

Communities Select Committee 15th January 2014

Item 4: Public questions

Submitted by: Spelthorne Borough Councillor Mr Ian Harvey

Question 1:

How is it possible to come up with a proposal that has such far reaching and potentially serious consequences and expect its public consultation to be taken seriously (and the public to have confidence in both the consultation and proposed changes) when clearly there has been no credible financial analysis carried out, and if such analysis has been carried out, why has it not been provided (at the very least, in confidence to relevant Borough Councillors / Local Committee members)?

Response:

The intention of Surrey County Council and that of the Fire Service is to maintain a balanced budget in 2013/14 and through the medium term financial plan to continue to deliver a combination of service improvements through transformations and implementation of planned budget reductions to secure efficient and effective delivery of front line services. The Fire Service has carefully considered and planned how best to operate within a reduced budget and in doing so has sought to generate opportunities to gain improvements in the deployment of fire engines across the county in order to deliver continued improvement in performance against the Surrey Response Standard.

Phase 1 of the Public Safety Plan proposed changes to the crewing arrangements at Staines fire station to day crewing, which requires less staff, whilst keeping one 24/7 whole-time crewed fire engine at Sunbury as part of an incremental change within the borough. The phase 2 proposal supported our strategic intention of securing performance improvements against the Surrey Response Standard whilst at the same time contributing towards the planned revenue savings that the service had committed to in the medium term financial plan and ensuring a more equitable provision of fire cover across the county. Phase 1 was not invoked because a location was identified in an area that the response modelling had suggested would generate improvements and this was referred to as the "optimum location".

The recent consultation in Spelthorne proposed the closure of two, 24/7 whole-time crewed fire stations and the relocation to a new site with one 24/7 whole-time crewed fire engine. There are two financial components to this proposal; firstly the revenue savings which will be generated by reducing and redeploying a number of whole-time staff to a new fire station in Spelthorne but also to other fire stations and secondly the capital costs associated with relocating into a new, efficient, fit for purpose fire station that not only supports our continued commitment to delivering a high quality service to the people of Surrey but also provides an opportunity for Fire, Police, Ambulance and other partner agencies to work even closer together, possibly

from one location. In doing so greater efficiencies and integration would flow, thereby supporting Public Service transformation and securing more effective and earlier joint prevention work.

As part of its planning process the Service considered a number of options which were communicated as part of the consultation. They are repeated here but they now include their associated costs;

- Option 1: To do nothing and maintain the status quo. The current annual operational costs (which are the direct costs of fire-fighters) of maintaining one fire engine at each of the two locations in Spelthorne (Sunbury and Staines) are in the order of £2.12million. In effect this equates to each 1 fire engine 24/7 whole-time fire station having annual operating costs in the order of £1.06million. This option would not yield any of the revenue savings required in the medium term financial plan neither would it deliver any improvements against the Surrey Response Standard across the county.
- Option 2: Implement the Public Safety Plan Phase 1 deployment (24 hour cover at Sunbury, 12 hour day cover at Staines). As previously mentioned this option was not progressed due to the opportunity to move to phase 2 because a site had been identified within the area that generated improvements in the Surrey Response Standard.
- Option 3 (a): Close Sunbury and maintain Staines. Based on the operating costs this would have generated revenue saving's in the order of £1.06million through the reduction in establishment by not having Sunbury fire station but would have left the Service in a premises which is not owned by Surrey County Council and would have seen personnel remain in a premises that is in need of some considerable amount of on-going planned and reactive maintenance due to the age of the buildings.
- Option 3 (b): Close Staines and maintain Sunbury. This option generates the same amount of savings (£1.06million) as option 3(a) because of the reduction in establishment by not having Staines fire station but the Service would be located in premises that are owned by Surrey County Council. Again the premises are in need of some considerable amount of on-going planned maintenance due to the age of the buildings. Both option 3(a) and 3(b) do not fit with the optimised location by virtue of their geographical locations and therefore there is no improvement in the Surrey Response Standard.
- Option 4: Implement the proposal for a new fire station at an optimised location within the borough with one 24/7 whole-time crewed fire engine. Just like options 3(a) and 3(b) the revenue savings are in the order of £1.06million because of the reduction in establishment levels. By moving to a location based on the information provided by the analysis and modelling there will be an improvement in the overall Surrey Response Standard as follows; 1st response to all 2+ fire engine incidents from 80.8% to 82.5%, 2nd response to all 2+ fire engine incidents from 86.7% to 90.5% and 1st response to other emergencies from 96.8% to 98.9%.

During the consultation suggestions came forward with regard to other options which included having one new centrally located fire station but two 24/7 whole-time crewed fire engines. By comparison this configuration has an annual running cost of £1.95million and only yields a revenue saving in order of £170,000 per annum which is far short of the revenue savings required.

The consultation process did provide valuable information which resulted in another option being explored, considered and put forward in order to address the concerns expressed by Spelthorne residents and local leaders and which is now referred to as option 5 in the paper placed before the Communities Select Committee. Option 5 suggests a new centrally located fire station with one 24/7 whole-time crewed fire engine and one 24/7 fire engine staffed by people who are on-call (part-time staff who are available on a pager system from their place of work or at home) from the local community and who are trained to the same standards as whole-time staff. Surrey Fire and Rescue Service already operate this type of duty system in other parts of the county, for example, at Walton, Guildford and Haslemere. Under this option, 18 new local jobs would be created and would need to be recruited from within a 4-5 minute response footprint of the new location who would then commit to being available at least 54 hours each week and who would respond to the fire station having been alerted via a pager system. The annual operating costs of 18 staff on this "On-call" system are in the order of £170,000. This would be in addition to the costs of the one 24/7 whole-time crewed fire engine. Therefore option 5 delivers in the order of £800,000 of revenue savings but secures two fire engines in Spelthorne which is what most of the feedback indicated and generates 18 new employment opportunities in the borough whilst at the same time delivering improvements in the response standard. There is an initial one off start up cost of creating a new "On-call" crew in Spelthorne of around £80,000 associated with marketing, recruiting, training and providing the equipment to the new unit.

With any of the above options there are a number of associated cost savings as follows;

- Property running costs which are estimated at £35,000 per year per building based on the current building stock but future running costs will be dependent upon the final property solution and build type,
- Small savings in associated staff costs for training and personal protective equipment, future equipment and vehicle replacements. It must be noted that option 5 provides a small saving in future equipment costs but it does not deliver any savings against the vehicle replacement fund.

Finally there are the capital costs of the new build. The project is still at the pre-planning stage and therefore detailed capital costs for a new build and subsequent disposals are not currently known. However, the estimated net capital cost is anticipated to be in the region of £2million to £3million. The estimated capital cost of acquiring a site and building a new fire station in Spelthorne, and the associated

capital receipts from the possible disposal of Sunbury Fire station (Staines being owned by the Water Company) have been allowed for within an overall fire station rationalisation budget of £10.5m within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). The final build, design and contract awards will be subject to a separate cabinet paper.

The consultation process has highlighted that there were gaps in the information that we presented to the public. As with previous consultations we will review the comments, feedback and experiences of the past 6 months and we will seek to incorporate them into future consultations.

Question 2:

How can the potential significantly increased risk arising from the construction and operation of the Charlton Lane “gassifier” (especially given the fate of its Scottish “cousin”) not be assessed and taken account of in the proposed reduction in Spelthorne Fire cover?

Response:

Throughout the public consultation reference was made to the planned Waste Management facility at Charlton Lane, Shepperton, referred to as the “Eco-Park”. In particular, concerns were voiced with regard to the increase in risk because of the nature of that facility and that by reducing the number of fire appliances in Spelthorne the risk may be increased further.

In responding to this question the Service will outline how it approaches the management of risk, and in particular fire risk in the community and how it contributes to supporting community resilience.

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service conduct assessments of the risks for which it has a statutory responsibility which are defined by the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004. The analysis draws upon various data and information sources including the Community Risk Register produced by Surrey Local Resilience Forum, census data and information from partner agencies. That analysis identifies the prevailing types of risks against which we then plan the delivery of our services. In Surrey the risks include fires in the home, fires in commercial and public buildings, Road Traffic Collisions and life threatening special services. Our main focus is on reducing the incidence of deaths and injuries associated with fires. This can be seen in figure 1 below.

Figure 1 The prevailing risks across Surrey for which Surrey Fire and Rescue has a statutory duty



Surrey Fire and Rescue is also a Category 1 Responder within the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. Under that legislation we also contribute to the assessment of the risk pertaining to major incidents. A major incident can be defined as *“An emergency that requires the implementation of special arrangements by one or more of the emergency services, and generally requires the involvement, directly or indirectly of large numbers of people”*. This could be a large scale industrial accident such as the fire in Buncefield, Hertfordshire (2005) or a wide area event such as flooding or a large, protracted commons fire such as Swinley Forest, Berkshire (2011). Surrey Fire and Rescue Service and its partners in Surrey Local Resilience Forum (SLRF) monitor events that happen in order to identify whether the type of infrastructure and activities (for example, industrial sites, chemical sites) that have led to major incidents elsewhere in the UK and overseas exist in Surrey. Surrey Fire and Rescue Service also considers the publicly available Community Risk Register, produced by the Surrey Local Resilience Forum which lists a wide range of civil contingencies, their likelihood and potential impact. They are identified by a combination of reviewing national and international historical incidents, and by recognising the potentially hazardous activities undertaken across the County. From the Community Risk Register it can be seen that risk reference HL7 Fire / Explosion “Industrial explosions and major fires” would be seen to apply to the “Eco-Park”. The Community Risk Register records the likelihood of this type of incident happening as “medium to low” with the associated impact as being “minor”. Overall the risk is recorded as being “medium” with the associated control measures being the Surrey Major Incident Plan & SLRF Plan, Category 1 responder plans / procedures, Site operator emergency plans and Legislative controls.

Surrey Fire and Rescue Services approach to risk mitigation and management has, and continues to be, to develop integrated risk reduction initiatives to address identified priorities in the most cost-effective way. These are then embedded into various initiatives across our Community Fire Prevention, Community Fire Protection teams and Emergency Response arrangements. As has been outlined Surrey Fire and Rescue Service’s approach to risk assessment identifies and estimates the predominant risks for which a response is required by statute, or needed as an “accepted” responsibility by Surrey Fire and Rescue Service; and for which community based fire prevention and protection activity can be shown to reduce those risks. As one would expect the frequency and type of incident varies from one locality to another but by approaching it in this way it allows our prevention and protection activity to be co-ordinated and integrated to provide an efficient use of resources.

The level, type and distribution of our prevention, protection and response resources will then aim to reduce risk “as low as reasonably practicable” by utilisation of the resources available to Surrey Fire and Rescue Service, as well as those that may be deployed by engaging in partnership with others. They will be applied in such a manner as to be proportionate to the identified risk. The highest risks will attract the highest priority. A good example of this type of approach has been in relation to our work with Adult Social Care. By studying the trends in fire deaths and injuries we have identified key “at risk” groups including people over 65 years of age, people with mental health difficulties and people with mobility problems (more information can be found in our publication “Keeping you safe from fire”).

This integrated approach to the management of risk is not solely dependent on the fire service. We work with a wide range of partners on a statutory basis as well as those in the private and voluntary sector (see figure 2 below)



Figure 2 Surrey Fire and Rescue Service integrated risk management

This approach spans all of our community fire prevention, protection and response arrangements. The “Eco-Park” is one example where the safe operation of the site is the responsibility of many people and regulatory bodies of which the fire service is one. Any new building is subject to a planning regime followed by compliance with building regulations and then, if it is a licensed operation or premises compliance with the various legislative framework that applies.

The role of the fire service community fire protection teams within the built environment is to ensure that premises are safe with regard to fire and fire related hazards and their associated risks. It does that by visiting premises to ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and through statutory consultation frameworks with other bodies such as local borough Building Control departments. Statutory frameworks have designated lead bodies whether it is the Local Authority, Environment Agency or Fire Service, all of whom will have powers confirmed upon them under the legislation. Such frameworks may also state when the different bodies will be required to share information and whether any responses must or may be considered. With regard to the “Eco-Park” the Fire Service will provide a response under Part B (Approved Document B) of schedule 1 of the Building Regulations which covers the requirements with respect to fire safety when an application is received by the local authority or approved inspector. Architects, designers, the operators, managers and the Environment Agency will all contribute to the safe and effective operation of the premises. It is not the sole responsibility of the Fire Service to manage the risk.

The Waste industry has suffered from a number of high profile fires but the number of fires at waste recycling sites has decreased in 2012 with The Environment Agency stating that the number of waste recycling fires has decreased by almost 30%. The Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) has recognised that there is the potential for these types of incidents to “have a huge impact not only on the local community and environment but also to the economy via enforced road closures and the commitment of significant fire-fighting resources”. In an effort to reduce the potential for such fires to occur and mitigate the impacts of those that do, CFOA are working in partnership with organisations such as the Environment Agency and the Wood & Tyre Recycling Association to examine incident statistics and review existing guidance. They are also seeking to work with site operators to improve safety and lobby the government for decisive action, including legislative change where necessary. CFOA has welcomed the issue of an Environment Agency Technical Guidance Note “Reducing Fire Risk at Sites Storing Combustible Materials” to reduce the frequency and impact of fires at waste and recycling sites. The guidance clarifies the measures that waste sites must take to minimise the risk of fires and pollution and it will be adopted by the various regulatory bodies.

Mrs Denise Saliagopoulos
Chairman of Communities Select Committee

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