

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 14 FEBRUARY 2024
REPORT OF: CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE
AUTHOR: GRAEME WORRALL

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-28

Purpose of Report

1. This report seeks approval of the Community Risk Management Plan 2024-28 (CRMP 2024-28). Members have been provided with a summary as well as full details of the feedback received through the consultation process.

Recommended: That Members

- [1] In considering whether to approve the CRMP 2024-28, take into account the feedback received through the consultation on the draft CRMP; and
- [2] Approve the CRMP 2024-28 (attached as Appendix 1); and
- [3] Authorise the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive to make any final drafting amendments to the CRMP prior to publication on 1 April 2024.

Background

2. Under the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, fire and rescue authorities are required to produce a CRMP (formerly an Integrated Risk Management Plan, or IRMP), outlining the key fire and rescue related risks and their plans to address and mitigate them through prevention, protection and emergency response.
3. In advance of the expiry of the current 2020-2024 IRMP, officers began work to develop a new plan to cover the period 2024-2028, which would also include the outcomes of a review of the way in which emergency fire cover is provided.

Information

4. There are several documents that are referenced throughout this report and are included as appendices. These are:

- **Appendix 1:** Community Risk Management Plan 2024-2028.
 - **Appendix 2:** Draft CRMP Consultation Feedback Report. This provides analysis of the pre-consultation, development of options, consultation programme and feedback received through the process.
 - **Appendix 3:** Draft CRMP Consultation Feedback (Additional Resources). This lists the free text comments received via the consultation survey and full copies of responses received from partners.
 - **Appendix 4:** Fire Brigades Union response to CFRS Community Risk Management Plan 2024-2028
5. The following sections of the report summarise the pre-consultation activity; the consultation programme and outputs, as well as consideration of the feedback received.

Pre-consultation

6. The development of the draft CRMP, and the associated fire cover review, were informed by a comprehensive programme of public and staff pre-consultation, which took place in June and July 2023. This included an online survey, to which 185 members of the public and 226 members of staff responded, as well as other methods of engagement.
7. Details and outcomes of the pre-consultation and the fire cover review are contained within Appendix 2 (sections 3 and 4). Members were engaged in the pre-consultation and fire cover review process through a series of planning days during July and August 2023. Section 3.4 of Appendix 2 outlines how the feedback received through the pre-consultation influenced the development of the draft CRMP.
8. The draft CRMP was presented for Members' consideration at the Fire Authority meeting on 27 September 2023 and was approved for consultation.

Consultation programme

9. The consultation ran for 13 weeks, from 2 October 2023 to 2 January 2024. Section 4 of Appendix 2 provides detail of the activities included in the consultation programme. As with previous consultations, there were three main strands of activity focussing on the public, staff and partners, with different engagement methods used for each.

Public consultation

- 32 public roadshows across Cheshire, at which a total of 4,200 consultation packs were distributed.

- Detailed and summary consultation information and explanatory videos published on a dedicated page on cheshirefire.gov.uk
- News release to local and regional media about the consultation.
- Advertising on the Service's social media channels.
- An awareness campaign on local radio.
- Email newsletters to residents via the Service's Neighbourhood Alert System.
- Engagement with local authority citizen panels.
- Two public focus group sessions, including one organised through the Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Race Equality Centre.

Staff consultation

- 32 consultation events engaging with teams across the Service, facilitated by senior officers.
- Promotion through the intranet, internal newsletters and emails.
- A conference for Service managers.
- Staff focus groups.

Partner consultation

- Direct emails to local councils, Members of Parliament and statutory partners.
- Face to face briefings to MPs, unitary authorities, town and parish councils.

10. The primary source of feedback was via an online and paper survey, which received a total of 459 responses. Of these, 377 respondents identified as members of the public, 21 as members of staff and three as local partners (Knutsford Town Council, Chester Aid to the Homeless and a local Cheshire West and Cheshire councillor). Other respondents did not state whether they were public, staff or partners. In addition, there was one public response via email.

11. Formal responses were submitted via email by 10 partners and stakeholders:

- Fire Brigades Union (FBU)
- West Cheshire Trades Union Council
- Warrington and District Trades Union Council
- Chester Retired Firefighters
- Birchwood Town Council
- Bollington Town Council
- Holmes Chapel Parish Council
- Northwich Town Council
- Stockton Heath Parish Council
- Councillor Sam Naylor (Cheshire West and Chester councillor)

Consultation responses

12. Sections 6-12 of Appendix 2 detail the feedback received during the consultation programme. A summary of this is provided in the paragraphs below. Free text comments and responses from consultees are provided separately and in full within Appendices 3 and 4.

Identification and management of risks

13. Respondents were asked about the extent to which they agreed that the draft CRMP identifies key fire and rescue risks; whether the proposals within the CRMP address the risks identified; and if there are any additional risks which they feel should be considered in the development of the final CRMP. A summary is provided below, with further analysis in section 6 of Appendix 2.
14. A total of 64.70% of respondents felt that the draft CRMP either completely or mostly identifies the key fire and rescue risks facing Cheshire, compared with 16.77% of respondents who felt it identified only few or no risks.
15. In relation to the management of these risks, a total of 60.78% of respondents agreed that the draft CRMP either completely or mostly addresses the key fire and rescue risks that have been identified, compared with 19.17% of respondents who felt that the draft CRMP either did not address the risks or only addressed a few risks.
16. The provision of fire cover is referred to in 36 narrative comments from the public, with 19 comments calling for increased levels of full-time fire cover across the county. Nine comments raised a concern over the fire cover proposals and the subsequent impact on overnight and weekend cover, and a further eight comments relate to the proposals regarding Northwich and Stockton Heath Fire Stations. Five comments call for a focus on increasing pay to improve the recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters, while 17 comments relate to community prevention activities and a preference for more education and awareness around both existing and emerging risks.
17. Two staff comments also relate to the fire cover proposals, while one refers to the need to ensure adequate water supplies to non-domestic premises. Further staff feedback through focus groups suggest that domestic violence and risks to vulnerable families should be highlighted as risks within the CRMP and suggest ways in which the Service's risk based inspection programme could be improved.
18. The consultation survey also asked respondents to state if they own lithium-ion battery products in the home and what related safety issues they would prefer to receive advice about; in order to help develop specific fire safety advice. Section 7 of Appendix 2 details the feedback received.

Changing how we measure and report our response times

19. Overall, 65.62% of survey respondents supported the proposed change, compared with 14.93% who opposed. Staff responses show 66.67% supported the proposal compared to 19.05% who oppose, while support from public respondents is 66.58%, against 14.86% who oppose the proposal.
20. Those who provided free text comments and support the change, saw measurement from time of call as positive and supported the use of a 10-minute response standard. Others acknowledged the benefit of being able to benchmark and compare performance more effectively, either with the Home Office data or with other fire and rescue services.
21. Some consultees questioned the proposed change from a percentage pass rate to the use of an average figure; suggesting that a move to an average figure could obscure instances where there are significantly longer response times.
22. Other respondents questioned whether measuring response times to primary fires instead of life-risk incidents meant the Service would no longer prioritise, or measure, performance against non-fire life risk incidents, such as road traffic collisions.
23. Staff comments largely reflected the feedback received from members of the public. The FBU and Chester Retired Firefighters offered support for the proposed change to measure response from the time of call. The FBU also suggested that all life risk incidents, not only primary fires, should be incorporated within the standard.
24. Further analysis is included in section 8 of Appendix 2.

Changing the provision of fire cover across Cheshire

25. The overall response showed that a majority of respondents broadly support the package of proposals. A total of 65.17% support the package compared with 22.52% who oppose it. Among public respondents, support is slightly higher at 66.31%, compared to 22.02% who oppose the proposals. Analysis shows that in many areas across Cheshire, most respondents outlined support for the proposals although there were higher levels of opposition locally in Northwich, Stockton Heath and Winsford.
26. Although staff responses to the survey were more limited, the majority (52.38%) were in support, compared with 33.34% who oppose them.
27. The survey asked respondents to identify the perceived benefits and potential drawbacks of the proposals. There were 233 comments related to the perceived positive impacts of the proposals and a further 232 comments regarding the perceived negative impacts of the proposals.
28. Section 9 of Appendix 2 provides a detailed analysis of consultation responses about these proposals, however feedback is summarised below.

Converting four on-call fire engines to wholetime weekday engines

29. Where members of the public gave positive feedback, the most frequently made point was about the benefit of having improved fire cover across Cheshire as a result of the proposals. Respondents highlighted the reassurance that this would provide during weekdays; quicker response times; an increase in the number of areas that are afforded an element of guaranteed fire cover and a view that this is a more effective and efficient use of resources.
30. Staff comments also reference the improved levels of guaranteed fire cover, particularly during periods of peak activity, as well as an increase in capacity to undertake community safety work to reduce risk and demand. Concerns about the proposals centred on the effect on overnight and weekend cover, as well as the impact on affected on-call staff.
31. The FBU offered qualified support for the proposal. Holmes Chapel Parish Council and Bollington Town Council also expressed support, citing improved response times and additional benefit to the community arising from the changes.
32. In their submissions, Northwich Town Council and Councillor Sam Naylor (Cheshire West and Chester) raised concerns over the proposed change to the on-call fire engine at Northwich Fire Station.

Introduction of day crewing at Knutsford Fire Station

33. Three public respondents specifically referenced the proposed change at Knutsford, all of which considered it to be a positive move. Staff feedback was largely supportive of the proposal, acknowledging the rationale behind the proposal and the benefits to fire cover.
34. Feedback from staff based at Knutsford focused on the issues around the allocation of housing and the transfer of staff to the new system. Specific queries were raised in relation to the transfer of the technical rescue unit from its current base at Lymm to Knutsford. These centred on staffing and training requirements.
35. Knutsford Town Council confirmed their support for the draft CRMP and in particular the proposal for Knutsford Fire Station. The FBU response outlines support but raises an objection to the proposal to transfer the technical rescue unit, as referred above. This is echoed by the Chester Retired Firefighters.

Reorganisation of daytime fire cover in Warrington

36. Ten public comments referred to the proposed changes in Warrington. Nine relate to the change in fire cover and raise concerns over what is perceived to be a reduced level of cover in certain areas, while a further comment

questioned how the impact on staff living in Authority housing in Stockton Heath would be managed.

37. Operational staff working at Stockton Heath raised questions about the release of the housing associated with the station and the support that could be offered to help those affected.
38. Responses were received from several partners. The FBU stated that the current on-call provision at Stockton Heath should be maintained; citing the risk profile in the area requires the maintenance of current arrangements. Warrington District Trades Union Council object for similar reasons.
39. The response from Stockton Heath Parish Council outlined support for the overall plan and understanding of the rationale behind the proposal. Birchwood Town Council did not provide any further comment beyond seeking reassurance that additional prevention and protection work, which the proposals enable, will also be carried out in the Birchwood area

Improving the on-call duty system

40. Respondents were asked to provide comments and suggestions to improve the on-call duty system. A total of 176 free text comments were received and of these, 153 were provided by public respondents and 14 from staff. Section 10 of Appendix 2 provides a detailed commentary of responses received.
41. The most frequently raised issue, from public, staff and partners, is the need to ensure pay and recognition for on-call firefighters is improved; suggesting that improving this will in turn lead to increased recruitment and better retention.
42. Public and staff feedback also suggests that the recruitment process for on-call firefighters should be more effective and efficient; highlights the need to raise awareness in the community and among employers of the on-call duty system (also featured in partner feedback) and suggests ways to improve flexibility, including widening the catchment area of an on-call station.
43. While partners such as the FBU support strengthening the on-call system, suggestions were made about improving the system, including improving career development opportunities for staff. Both the FBU and Chester Retired Firefighters highlighted the impact of the Service's migration policy (on-call staff moving into full-time roles) on on-call availability.

Additional comments

44. Respondents were asked if they had any other comments they wished to make. A total of 142 comments were provided. Analysis of these is provided in section 12 of Appendix 2.
45. There were 30 public and staff comments which expressed support for the proposals within the draft CRMP. Consultees acknowledged the depth and

detail of the draft CRMP and proposals were viewed as a positive step forward for the Service and the community.

46. There were 15 public and staff comments which expressed concern or opposition to the proposals within the draft CRMP. The majority of these centred around converting the on-call fire engine at Northwich to a weekday daytime fire engine and the perceived impact that this would have on the community. Four comments expressed concerns related to the proposed change at Stockton Heath and the removal of Authority housing, in particular citing the impact on staff.

Responding to consultation feedback

47. A requirement of the consultation process is to consider the feedback received on the draft CRMP and taking this into account in the development of the final, published version.

Identification and management of risks

48. The feedback regarding the use of lithium-ion battery products will be used by officers to inform the development of relevant and appropriate safety advice and interventions.

Changing how we measure and report our response times

49. Given the feedback, and the reasoning, expressed by consultees; the proposed change to the measuring and reporting of response times remains unaltered. The outcomes of the pre-consultation should also be reflected, where respondents suggested that measuring an average response time was seen as easier to understand. A single, concise response standard would provide the public with a readily understood benchmark of performance.
50. Regarding the concerns raised, the monitoring of performance against the response standard is monitored by the Authority's Performance and Overview Committee. This means Fire Authority Members will continue to have regular oversight of performance against the new standard. These reports are publicly available.
51. It is also at the discretion of Members to scrutinise data against other types of incident, thereby providing accountability for performance of activity which would not be captured by the response standard.

Changes to the provision of fire cover

52. Feedback received from the consultation was, overall, supportive of the proposed package of changes, with consultees who supported the proposals acknowledging the improvement to the level of guaranteed fire cover and viewing them as a more effective and efficient use of resources.

53. It is recognised that there are localised concerns regarding the change to the on-call fire engine at Northwich Fire Station and the changes at Stockton Heath Fire Station. However, these need to be offset by the wider improvements across Cheshire to emergency response provision, and increased capacity for community prevention and protection work.
54. Feedback from staff and trade unions, as well as some public comments, also highlighted the impact on staff affected by the proposals.
55. Therefore, while the proposal remains unchanged, officers are committed to engaging at an early stage with staff and trade unions to manage the implementation of the new duty system for weekday fire engines. There would be an agreed process for redeploying affected staff and efforts would be made to mitigate the impact of staff being required to vacate Authority housing.

Review of the on-call duty system

56. Given the weight of feedback from consultees regarding the importance of pay and recognition as a key part of improving the on-call duty system, this will form the first element of the review. Further feedback from the consultation will be considered by officers responsible for the review.

Financial Implications

57. Subject to the approval of Members, the fire cover proposals within the CRMP will lead to an additional cost of circa £57,000 per year. This is deemed to be affordable and can be met through delivering efficiencies elsewhere in the organisation.
58. The pre-consultation engagement and consultation programme were subject to advice and guidance and a formal quality assurance review from the Consultation Institute. The cost for these activities totalled £44,450. Other costs, including promotional materials and consultation activities were met from existing budgets.

Legal Implications

59. The publication of the CRMP by 1 April 2024 will fulfil the Authority's statutory obligations under the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. The consultation process has been undertaken to comply with recognised standards of practice and legal requirements.

Equality and Diversity Implications

60. Equalities Impact Assessments (EIAs) have been created to support the proposals subject to consultation and consultees have been asked to provide feedback against the EIAs, which is documented in section 11 of Appendix 2. Feedback highlighted age and the ageing population of Cheshire, as well as the need to treat rural and urban areas equally.

61. The feedback will be incorporated into revised EIAs and considered as part of the implementation of the plans, subject to Members' approval of the CRMP.

Environmental Implications

62. There are no environmental implications. The published CRMP will primarily be an online document in order to reduce paper consumption.

**CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE PLANNING
MANAGER
TEL [01606] 868804**

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- **APPENDIX 1: COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-2028**
- **APPENDIX 2: DRAFT COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-2028
CONSULTATION FEEDBACK REPORT**
- **APPENDIX 3: DRAFT COMMUNITY RISK MANGEMENT PLAN 2024-2028
CONSULTATON FEEDBACK (ADDITIONAL RESOURCES)**
- **APPENDIX 4: FIRE BRIGADES UNION RESPONSE TO CFRS COMMUNITY
RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-2028**