

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: ESTATES AND PROPERTY COMMITTEE
DATE: 14 DECEMBER 2018
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND COMMISSIONING
AUTHOR: ANDREW LEADBETTER

SUBJECT: RUNCORN FIRE STATION MODERNISATION

Purpose of Report

1. To allow Members to indicate their preferred approach to the modernisation of Runcorn Fire Station.

Note:

This report has been written on the assumption that Runcorn will be the first of the three fire stations where remodelling may be approved.

Recommended: That

- [1] Members note progress to date and indicate their preferred approach to the modernisation of Runcorn Fire Station.

Background

2. Runcorn Fire Station was built in 1960. In addition to the operational facilities on the site (one whole time appliance and one on-call appliance), Runcorn provides the support crew for the Incident Command and Control Unit (the Unit can be located at Runcorn as well as Northwich). The following uses are also accommodated, Prince's Trust, Fire Cadets and members of the community at the Health Gym. The site has significant community activity with local schools utilising the gardens too.
3. Runcorn Fire Station was used by officers to model a typical modernisation in order to help inform the overall modernisation programme. It was felt that it had most of the elements that might be encountered around the fire station estate. However, it soon became clear that the Fire Station was poorly laid out and could benefit from remodelling.
4. A good deal of engagement has taken place with staff based at the Fire Station in order to assist in the preparation of the modernisation proposals.
5. It is thought that two other fire station sites, Ellesmere Port and Macclesfield may also benefit from some remodelling. However, detailed work has not been carried out at those two sites, yet.

Information

Developing the Proposals at Runcorn

6. Officers had the benefit of the condition survey that was carried out in January 2017. This document is attached to this report as Appendix 1 (the detailed costs have been removed as their relevance is limited). Members will see that the total figure at the time of the survey was estimated to be £435k.
7. Once a problem had been identified with the layout of the Fire Station assistance was sought from external advisers in order to work through various scenarios and produce options for the potential remodelling of the Fire Station. In addition further work was carried out to determine the best approach to modernising the external appearance of the Fire Station (albeit this was intended to inform the modernisation programme as a whole).

The Modernisation Only Option

8. When the Remodelling Options (see below) were being prepared a figure was produced for what were essentially those works identified during the condition survey, plus additional improvements, including some external treatment of the building. The estimated figure for this option was £550k. This would obviously deliver a significant improvement to the site, which has had some investment in recent years e.g. the gym. It would, however, cost at least 50% less than any of the Remodelling Option.

The Remodelling Options

9. There are three layout plans showing the remodelling options. These are attached to this report as Appendix 2 (Options 1, 2 and 4 – Option 3 was discounted as it did not deliver the operational requirements that were needed at the Fire Station).
10. The pros and cons associated with the three options are summarised in a table that is attached to this report as Appendix 3. Costs attributed to the three options are only estimated at this stage, though it is clear that Option 1 is bound to be cheaper than Options 2 and 4.
11. Members will see that Option 1 accommodates operational and community uses in one block, albeit with separation to provide improved security. Option 1 does involve some compromise: the training tower will be adequate, but it does not have some of the features that are available on the more modern steel structures; and training activity may be moved nearer to adjacent neighbouring properties and will need to be adequately shielded to avoid disturbance. However, it is the cheapest of the three options and it could cost circa £200k to £250k less than the other options.

12. Members will see that Options 2 and 4 both see operational and community uses separated by the appliance bays. This is likely to reduce the interaction between operational staff and community users, which seems to conflict with the arrangements on other fire station sites. Both options will see the demolition of the training tower (which is perfectly serviceable) and provision of a new more modern training tower – all in costing in excess of £75k for this one change. Option 4 is expected to be the most expensive of the options.

Consultation

13. Staff at Runcorn Fire Station have been consulted. They have provided some input and they understandably would like to see the Fire Station remodelled. Their favoured option is Option 2. Option 1 would be their third choice remodelling option.
14. Naturally, Officers and Members are likely to wish to deliver what the staff at Runcorn Fire Station want. Their expectations have understandably been raised. However, two questions arise: firstly, can the additional costs associated with remodelling be justified from a value for money point of view; and secondly, can this level of expenditure be justified at this point given the need to improve 20 other fire stations from within the £8.5m budget?

External Appearance

15. Members received a document entitled 'Corporate Image Upgrade' a few months ago. This showed a variety of treatments that could significantly update the external appearance of the fire stations. These treatments were costed for Runcorn Fire Station. The costs were significant and Officers were not convinced that these would be affordable. As a result further work has been carried out and alternative cheaper treatments suggested, with associated cost estimates.
16. At this time officers do not propose to seek guidance from Members about this issue, believing that the detailed specification needs further development to give greater clarity about the overall costs associated with the remodelling and modernisation works. In essence, the question about external appearance needs to be set in the context of the overall anticipated costs and budget constraints.

Preference, Budget and Next Steps

17. It will be helpful to understand what Members would prefer, modernisation only or remodelling. If remodelling is the preference then it seems prudent to carry out further work in order to clarify the likely costs as only estimates exist at present. There would be two aspects to this further work. The Runcorn remodelling would be considered in more detail and costed again to establish the likely best budget that it might be achieved for. In addition, the potential remodelling works at Ellesmere Port and Macclesfield would be developed to

provide a reasonably sound indication of the potential costs of remodelling at those two sites. Whilst this work was taking place the works at Bollington and Tarporley would be agreed and firm prices would be confirmed. All of this work would give officers and Members a much firmer basis upon which to make a decision about spend at Runcorn (and elsewhere). They would have greater confidence about the likelihood of the budget achieving the desired outcome; modernisation of all of the 21 fire stations covered by the £8.5m budget.

Financial Implications

18. Members will be aware that the budget for the modernisation programme will not deliver all elements of necessary modernisation unless it is very closely managed. To this end it is essential that all aspects are challenged as specifications are developed. This is particularly important on the sites where remodelling is to be considered, where the sums involved might account for a disproportionate amount of the overall budget. The figures for Runcorn suggest that it has the potential to account for up to 15% of the £8.5m budget if it is remodelled. This feels like too great a sum to expend on one site, particularly so early in the programme. If repeated elsewhere this might lead to a failure to deliver the modernisation of all of the 21 fire stations included in the programme. Given that Runcorn is one of three fire stations that require remodelling this feels like a very real risk.

Legal Implications

19. There are no legal implications that flow directly from the decision sought from Members at this stage.

Equality and Diversity Implications

20. The modernisation works include: a new accessible parking bay and ramp; and improved female washroom facilities, which do not appear to be fit for purpose at present.

Environmental Implications

21. The modernisation will deliver environmental improvements. The precise extent and impact will depend upon the chosen way forward and the budget that is made available for environmental improvements.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE