

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: ESTATES AND PROPERTY COMMITTEE
DATE: 14 DECEMBER 2018
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND COMMISSIONING
AUTHOR: GROUP MANAGER, PAUL BINYON

SUBJECT: FIRE STATION MODERNISATION PROGRAMME
– DELIVERY SCHEDULE

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members about the development of the fire station modernisation programme. To secure approval of the proposed delivery schedule for the programme.

N.B. This report is not concerned with the four new fire stations, or Chester, Crewe, and Warrington fire stations. It is focused on the remaining 21 fire stations.

Recommended: That Members

- [1] Note progress with the development of the fire station modernisation programme;
- [2] Agree the delivery schedule for the fire station modernisation programme.

Background

2. In September 2018 the Fire Authority agreed a programme to modernise 21 of its fire stations. It included the sum of £8.5m in its capital programme and released an initial sum of £3.5m. In committing to the programme the Fire Authority noted the requirement to engage with the Estates and Property Committee as well as reporting on progress to Performance and Overview Committee.

Information

Introduction

3. Since the decision in September 2018 officers have carried out a significant amount of work to mobilise for the delivery of the programme.
4. At the time of the Fire Authority decision, it was noted that the programme would only be successfully delivered with adequate dedicated resource and that the Estates and Facilities team was unable to absorb this significant body of work. The Head of Estates and Facilities produced a role specification for the kind of additional resource that he believed would be critical to the success of the programme. It was decided, at least initially, to use a member of the in-house team with significant knowledge of the fire station stock to drive the programme

forward. This has not only allowed the programme to progress quickly it is also more cost-effective than a bought-in resource. As previously a Group Manager will act as the bridge between the Estates and Facilities team and the operational and other staff at the fire stations.

5. Given the desire to make progress officers from the Procurement team have quickly researched the options for securing contractors. They have identified a number of routes to market and helped officers take advantage of one which significantly simplifies the procurement process and should reduce the time before contractors are engaged and on site. This is a framework arrangement that is designed for smaller works and it involves a local contractor. This may not be the answer for the whole programme, but it has helped officers to achieve some momentum. Other procurement methods may be more appropriate for other elements of the programme e.g. if larger works are involved and/or works are packaged together. Procurement colleagues will continue to support the programme to ensure that the budget is spent wisely.

Developing a Specification

6. The work concerning Runcorn Fire Station has been invaluable in helping officers to understand elements of the programme. The work at Bollington and Tarporley has also furthered this understanding.
7. Generally, the process begins with the condition surveys. Although these are nearly two years old now, they are still a useful starting point. At a specific location the condition survey will be discussed with the Crew Managers and Station Managers and there is also consultation with staff. Their feedback helps to identify issues that would not have been apparent to the person that produced the condition survey. Staff are obviously keen to see their facilities improved as well as having the fire stations updated. Officers involved in the delivery of the programme need to balance expectations with the reality of the available budget. However, currently the reaction of staff based at the fire stations has been very positive as they can see that a significant improvement will occur, even if they don't necessarily see everything included that they would like.

Specific Issues

8. The following headings cover some of the specific issues that are being picked up as a specification is developed. They are in alphabetical order rather than in order of importance.

Appearance (external and internal)

9. The external appearance of some of the stations is dated. Officers have had a range of options prepared with some indicative costs provided. Perhaps, unsurprisingly the cost of updating the external appearance of all of the fire stations is prohibitive and beyond the budget that has been allocated. Accordingly, efforts will concentrate on certain elevations of those fire stations that are in prominent locations. The external appearance for all fire stations will be improved

as the programme is delivered, but the work will be more about refresh than change.

10. The internal look of the fire stations will aim to mirror that achieved at the new fire stations which have received good feedback and which appear to offer more resilience to wear and tear than some of the internal decorations at older fire stations.
11. Staff have suggested that some form of consistent lettering/emblem should be introduced and this is being considered.

Environment

12. Modernisation of the fire stations will see a range of works carried out that will help to improve the performance of the buildings from an environmental perspective, e.g. replacement windows and doors, increased insulation, LED lighting and replacement boilers. The extent of this work will depend upon the available budget and the cost versus benefit.

Equality

13. The programme will not only see the improvement of the standard of the washroom facilities, it will make them fit for all staff to use. There will be a focus on improving the facilities for female members of staff as these tend to be of poor quality. Where possible gender-neutral pods will be created.
14. The programme will look to improve access to the fire stations and the facilities in them for staff and community users that have a disability.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing

15. Over and above the works that will tackle any health and safety issues that have not been dealt with as part of the normal maintenance regime for the fire stations a few themes have emerged that need to be tackled.

Firstly, there needs to be a better solution for the gyms that are necessary for operational staff. Currently, some exist in appliance bays and a solution will be designed (which could be applied at a number of our sites) when the works at one of the first fire stations is fully specified. This should help secure a single standard of gym equipment.

Secondly, there are some concerns about the efficiency of ventilation in the fire appliance bays. This will also be dealt with.

Thirdly, there has been a recent development in relation to the handling of fire kit that has been used at a fire. Areas will be created in each fire station to allow the kit to be managed and stored prior to it being collected for cleaning.

Fourthly, some of the heating arrangements are not ideal and improvements will be included where necessary.

Security

16. There is already a programme to upgrade security at fire stations which is being delivered by the Estates and Facilities team. However, some of the security measures will need to be reviewed as the specifications are developed on specific fire stations.

Training

17. The programme will, where possible, include enhancements to training facilities. This may, on most sites, be limited to the training towers. The new training towers that have been installed at the new fire stations will be considered where the investment can be justified.

Various

18. Staff have expressed some frustrations about the standard of work that has been carried out at the fire stations in the past. They have pointed out some of these works and the modernisation programme will deal with these as it progresses. The Estates and Facilities team have been tasked with ensuring that this is avoided in future. This will be a focus for the team delivering the programme and also for the team responsible for ongoing maintenance.
19. There has been one item that has featured fairly regularly in discussions with staff where there is an intention to change from the current policy. In recent years there has been a move away from the fitting of the stainless steel industrial-type kitchens at fire stations toward the fitting of good quality domestic-type kitchens instead. Staff do not believe that the domestic kitchens are appropriate and question whether they will be cheaper in the long run. An affordable stainless steel kitchen has been identified and will be incorporated into the specification at those fire stations where the kitchen is to be replaced. This may seem insignificant, but it is evidence of staff feedback being acted upon.

Preparing the Delivery Schedule

20. The following factors have guided officers when prioritising the fire stations and placing them in the Delivery Schedule that is attached as Appendix 1 of this report:
 - The worst fire stations appear earlier in the schedule, where possible.
 - The stations that are subject to potential/proposed changes such as co-location of partners appear later in the schedule.
 - The impact of moving operational training from Sadler Road to fire stations around the County has resulted in these Fire Stations appearing at a point in the schedule when training will have moved back to Sadler Road.
 - The scale of works at each fire station has been taken into account to ensure that the ongoing works throughout the schedule is manageable, e.g. a mixture of scale of works in any one year.

- There is a reasonable allocation across constituent authority areas.
21. Whilst the Delivery Schedule, once agreed, should be manageable, there are a number of external factors that might lead to it being changed, e.g. difficulties with planning permission where this is required. However, changes would be discussed with Members. It will be important that officers are able to react to changes to ensure that the pace of the programme is not unduly affected. This will require a robust process and adequate resourcing. The process to deliver the modernisation at a particular location is already developing with the work that has been carried out at Bollington, Runcorn and Tarporley.

Financial Implications

22. This decision does not have direct financial implications. However, it is important that the programme budget is tightly managed. Whilst it is appropriate that staff are encouraged to influence the specifications for the modernisation of the fire station it is important that those officers responsible for delivery of the programme and Members challenge proposals in order to safeguard the budget. The release of only £3.5m of the total £8.5m capital allocation does provide a milestone. Information about the programme will need to be presented to the Fire Authority before further funds are made available. Regular monitoring should help to ensure that there are no unexpected impacts as the programme progresses.

Legal Implications

23. This decision required at this stage does not have direct legal implications. However, the Fire Authority's interests will be safeguarded by robust procurement and contractual arrangements facilitated by the joint corporate support services.

Equality and Diversity Implications

24. The Equality and Inclusion Officer has already been engaged in the development of elements of the programme and will be encouraged to continue to influence the approach to equality and diversity issues at specific sites as the programme progresses.

Environmental Implications

25. The condition surveys identified areas where environmental improvements could be delivered relatively easily. However, further environmental measures may be introduced if they can be justified.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE