

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: **CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY**
DATE: **24TH JULY 2019**
REPORT OF: **DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND COMMISSIONING**
AUTHOR: **ANDREW LEADBETTER**

SUBJECT: **REPLACEMENT OF CHESTER FIRE STATION**

Purpose of Report

1. To update Members about progress and secure authority for officers to deal with one outstanding matter.

Recommended That Members:

- [1] Note the current position and response to the petitions; and
- [2] Authorise officers to withdraw the planning appeal once the pre-commencement planning conditions in relation to the planning permission are concluded.

Background

2. The Fire Authority confirmed its intention to replace Chester Fire Station on the current St Anne Street site in December 2017. It allocated £5.51m (plus contingency) to fund the project in February 2018.
3. Planning permission was obtained on 4th June 2019 at the second attempt. A planning appeal relating to the first planning application is pending.

Information

Current Activity and Next Steps

4. Given the settled intention of the Fire Authority to see a new fire station built on the existing St Anne Street site and the significant delay in securing planning permission officers and advisers are working to progress the project as quickly as possible. The planning permission includes some pre-commencement conditions and it is hoped that these can be discharged in the near future so that the work on site can finally commence.
5. The planning appeal has not progressed. Currently, there is no indication when it will be dealt with. The earliest that a decision could be expected is the autumn. Whilst there is an expectation that the Authority's case is relatively strong there is, obviously, no guarantee that the appeal will be successful.

6. Officers are working on the assumption that the construction contract will be entered into and the appeal will be withdrawn as soon as the pre-commencement planning conditions have been discharged. Officers do not believe that it makes sense to await the outcome of the appeal. Further delay would almost certainly lead to an increase in cost due construction inflation.

Petitions

7. Members will recall that petitions were presented to the Fire Authority at its meeting in April. The petitions are essentially about the same issues, but were achieved using different methods (one online and one hard copy) and contain slightly different wording. There were 6,495 signatories.

The online petition states:

“Two fire engines for Chester. Listen to the experience and concerns of retired firefighters, return Cheshire’s second fire engine and scrap plans to demolish and rebuild the current Chester fire station at a cost of £5m.”

The hard copy petition states:

“To see the return of Chester’s second fire engine and objection to the proposed spending of £5/£5.5m on a replacement fire station. Presented by Chester retired firefighters. Still caring for you”

8. Officers have written to the petitioner explaining that there appears to be a flaw in the petitions, because they seek to combine two separate matters. The capital funding set aside for the fire station project would not be made available to pay for a second fire engine for Chester if the fire station project did not proceed – it would be spent on another capital project. The response also points out that the building of the fire station will not impact upon the potential to have a second fire engine in Chester, because the new fire station will have the capacity to accommodate a second fire engine and the staff and associated equipment.
9. The petitioner has also been notified that the question of whether Chester has a second fire engine will be determined as part of a wide-ranging review the outcomes of which will be considered by the Fire Authority later this year. At that point the petitions will be considered alongside other representations made about the review.

Legal Implications

10. The Fire Authority will enter into a construction contract for the new fire station. This is based upon an industry standard document, but has been finalised with specific drafting by external legal advisers.
11. The Fire Authority is bound to consider the petitions, insofar as they are relevant, when it is considering the outcomes of the wide-ranging review

and consultation later this year. They will be a material consideration and sit alongside other responses to the consultation.

Financial Implications

12. The capital required for the replacement fire station will be funded from reserves. The sum of £5.51m plus 5% contingency is contained in the capital programme.
13. The additional planning and design work associated with the second planning application coupled with the considerable archaeological investigations has involved unexpected costs. The delay, in itself, is also likely to see some inflationary increases impacting upon costs. These factors have put considerable pressure on the budget and left little contingency. However, officers and advisers believe that aspects of the additional works have helped to mitigate some cost risks, e.g. the chance of finding something of archaeological importance has considerably reduced due to the extent of the investigations that have been required as part of the planning process.

Equality and Diversity Implications

14. The replacement fire station has been designed to better accommodate equality and diversity issues.

Environmental Implications

15. The replacement fire station will lead to environmental improvements over the existing fire station. The replacement fire station is expected to achieve a better environmental rating than the other new builds – BREEAM very good.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: None