

MEETING OF CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY 24TH JULY 2019

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MR. JONES

There has been much public comment around the current proposals to replace Chester Fire Station and the previous building of new fire stations at Powey Lane, Penketh, Alsager and Lymm at a combined cost around £20 million.

I am informed by a letter from the Fire Authority that a petition signed by 6400 people calling for the re-instatement of Chester's Second Fire Engine and objecting to the £5.5million re-building of Chester Fire Station is flawed. I am further informed that whilst some consideration will be given to the fire cover issues in Chester the new fire station project will not be re-considered.

However, in looking at the root cause analysis, it is by reducing the number of whole-time firefighters from 556 in 2009 to 397 in 2018 with the consequent savings that has allowed the transfer of funds from the operational response budget to fund the building of new fire stations.

There is a clear link between transferring under-spends from reducing the number of whole-time firefighters into a capital budget to build fire stations leading to Cheshire having a reduced number of whole-time fire engines.

I call upon the Chair to either facilitate a full Fire Authority debate to ascertain the collective response on this practice, or for him to give me a categorical re-assurance that he and the other Fire Authority Members are totally confident that their operational response model is fit for purpose and would hold up to the scrutiny of any public inquiry.

RESPONSE FROM CHAIR

Mr. Jones, you will appreciate that I cannot speak for other members of the Fire Authority.

The Fire Authority relies upon the professional advice of the Chief Fire Officer. The operational response model is based on that advice.

The Service was inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services last year and the report that was produced stated: 'The Service is effective at keeping people safe and secure.' It goes on to say: 'Its response to fires and emergencies locally is good...'

Members of the Fire Authority also scrutinise performance with the assistance of officers.

This endorsement by Her Majesty's Inspectorate, coupled with the scrutiny arrangements, provides me with confidence about the fitness of the operational response model.