

Cabinet have today given the go ahead for Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service and Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service to produce a business case to examine the possibility of closer collaborative working or combination.

Both Fire Authorities met independently today (Monday, September 22) to consider a strategic options appraisal report which had been produced by a Joint Review Group (made up of Councillors and officers from both Fire Services). This group has been considering the potential for closer working between the two Authorities since September 2007.

The initial options appraisal concluded that “subject to a full business case being developed by Warwickshire County Council and Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority, the Joint Review Group is now of the view that it is in the strategic, operational and financial interests of both Authorities to initiate a period of structural collaboration, leading towards full combination in 2010.”

Fire Authority Members have today agreed to commence the detailed work necessary to develop that business case. The purpose of the business case is to provide adequate information for each of the Authorities to make an informed judgement on the benefits and disadvantages of each of the options identified in the Strategic Options Appraisal. The three options considered were:

1. Maintenance of the Status Quo position
2. Expand collaboration
3. Full combination into a single Combined Fire & Rescue Authority.

The business case will also look at appropriate timescales for any potential structural collaboration and/or combination. The business case is due to be presented to the next Fire Authority Meeting in December 2008.

County Fire Officer, William Brown from Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service, said:

“The Joint Review Group identified significant synergies between the two Authorities in terms of the communities they serve, risks and challenges they face, and the organisational structures put in place to respond to them. The Joint Review Group therefore concludes that the two Authorities are well suited for closer working arrangements.

“The Joint Review recognises that closer collaborative working or combination is about improving our service and becoming more efficient over time. It is not about closing fire stations or cutting front line services to the public. This would of course mean that the public would continue to receive the excellent service they have come to expect from us.”

Portfolio Holder for Community Protection, Richard Hobbs said:

“The report put forward today by the Joint Service Review Group suggests that by closer collaborative working or combination we could increase our capacity and resilience, whilst continuing to maintain the high level of service the residents of Warwickshire receive. There is however, still more work to be done and I look forward to seeing the full business case which is expected to be presented to cabinet in December.”