

**Notes of meeting at Consultation meeting held at Alcester High School on 30 September 2009**

Attending - Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Chair)  
Councillor Hobbs  
Deputy CFO Glen Ranger  
Station Manager Ken Probyn (Alcester)

The format of the meeting was for arrival at 6.30 to collect and look through the paperwork provided with the presentation taking place from 7.00 p.m.

In the event the paperwork was delayed due to problems with traffic as the assistants with the paperwork got stuck crossing the Longbridge island.

After an introduction from the chairman Izzi Seccombe concerning the format etc. of the meeting there was a presentation by Glen Ranger to go through the consultation document in a bit more detail and a short speech by Councillor Hobbs followed by a question and answer session.

There were about 40 – 50 people in attendance from Alcester and outlying areas.

Glen Ranger briefly went through the document and the main points to come out of that were:

1. Following the change they expect there to be more engines available for more of the time in comparison to current availability.
2. The budget will be used more effectively, including better training and a focus on fire prevention.
3. Following the change there will be 12 strategically placed stations with 19 appliances.
4. They intend increasing the Retained Duty System (RDS) crew at Alcester, so as to increase availability and to site 1 whole-time engine at Alcester.
5. In addition to this there will be small fire units situated in the south of the county to provide a visible presence which will aid in cutting down arson and deliberate fires.
6. They intend bringing in another boat which is intended to be situated at either Alcester or Stratford.
7. They are introducing a fifth watch system based on a model introduced in Manchester but did not go into detail in explaining what a fifth watch system is.
8. Where stations are closing the redundant buildings are expected to be used for other community activities and community safety activities.
9. They are introducing a robust call challenge policy which basically means that, except for certain exceptions, they will not attend automated fire alarm calls unless they also receive verbal confirmation.
10. They intend bringing in a state of the art RTA unit.
11. The small fires unit will be crewed by 2 fire crew and 1 community police safety officer.

Councillor Hobbs then spoke briefly to advise that the council's involvement was that they had a duty to prevent fires and cut down on deaths from fire and related incidents.

He also stated that 50% of deaths happen prior to intervention by the fire service and therefore the introduction of more smoke alarms across the county will serve to reduce this.

The presentation took about half an hour and they then took questions. The questions were taken through the chair and were taken in batches of 3 rather than individually.

The main questions raised were as follows:

<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>
<p>How is it possible to make an informed decision as to whether the changes are beneficial when the consultation document is put together in such a way that it only shows the positives. What are the disadvantages of the proposals? (From Susan Jenet, Alcester councillor.)</p>	<p><i>The proposals have been formulated by professional fire officers who would not stand by any proposal which would disadvantage the crews or public. They could see no disadvantages to the proposals.</i></p>
<p>Can they give assurances that the radical changes being proposed won't affect the provision of services from WFRS? (From Mike Gittus, mayor of Alcester)</p>	<p><i>They assured Mike that the same level of services will be provided.</i></p>
<p>There is concern of the wider impact of pumping money into Alcester. What is the impact on Alcester and Bidford, in particular bearing in mind the potential decrease in fire cover following the change and the substantial potential increase in housing and residents in these areas? (from Nina ? didn't get surname but was known to councillors)</p>	<p><i>They have taken consideration of special strategies in the West Midlands and can guarantee 19 appliances available all of the time in comparison with 26 engines available for some of the time but sometimes down to 12 available and even as low as 8.</i></p>
<p>How was it possible to have a meeting attended to by concerned members of the public in view of the last minute change of venue from the fire station to the school? Even at lunch-time on the day of the meeting it was still advertised on the radio as being at the fire station. She was also concerned about the position regarding failure to respond to automated fire alarms. (Alcester resident)</p>	<p><i>They would look into the lack of publicity of the change of venue and Izzi Seccombe apologised for the lack of notification.</i></p>
<p>What is position regarding night-time cover in Alcester? (Alcester resident)</p>	<p><i>Will have complete cover as station will be whole-time.</i></p>
<p>There is concern over the knock on effect of the plan in particular the loss of 6 stations. How much of the plan are they serious about surviving following the consultation? Also concern that current response time 5-8 minutes. Could be 20 following repositioning (Wootton Wawen resident)</p>	<p><i>Glen Ranger assured the meeting that based on the model proposed response times would improve and would be within the national targets for response times.</i></p>

Where is the finance coming from to fund the scheme as surely parts of the scheme, such as converting Alcester station, would need to be in place before station shuts take place? (Alcester resident)

What are the running costs of Alcester fire station at present compared to running costs after the change? (Studley Councillor)

Not a question but concern voiced about how change of venue made it impossible for the elderly to attend and this was the third occasion when meetings concerning consultations have been misdirected. (Senior citizen action group)

Would it not be better to improve retained availability by recruiting more retained fire-fighters and promote businesses that support retained fire-fighters, possibly with a financial incentive rather than having a whole-time machine? (Alcester resident)

What are prospects of continued employment for Alcester fire-fighters and opportunities regarding new whole time crews? (Mike Gittus again)

Why are they so sure that a model based on Manchester, a city, will work on a rural brigade such as Warwickshire? (Alcester resident)

How can they say that there will be an improvement to levels of cover when the new system is introduced when, at present, they cannot keep the majority of whole-time crews operational and have to keep moving fire-fighters across stations just to keep current crews on the run? (Alcester resident)

There is currently very little additional space at Alcester fire station due to parking for doctor's etc. How are they going to cope with the additional demands of having a full time crew situated at Alcester? (Alcester resident)

*Not able to give full answer. May have to "borrow from the future" to help fund changes.*

*Approx £120K at present, expected to be approx £1 million after change.*

*Mike Gittus did point out that approx 60 posters had been laminated and placed around town and outlying areas advising of change in venue.*

*Glen advised that it was getting more difficult to recruit RDS fire-fighters as employers are less willing to let people go. NB This answer at odds with earlier answer about recruiting more RDS crew for Alcester.*

*Retained will be continue unchanged other than more of them. Initially recruiting whole-time from other affected stations.*

*Confident that the 5 watch system can be adapted for use in a more rural environment, once it has been "warwickshirised".*

*The global crewing system will mean that they will be able to keep more crews operational at any one time than is currently the case.*

*They concede that there will have to be alterations to accommodate change.*

If there are 2 pumps at Stratford and 2 at Warwickshire and the 2 whole-time pumps attend an incident in Stratford how does the stand-by system operate to ensure cover as there will only be 2 pumps left rather than 4 as is currently the case? (Alcester resident)

If there are less pumps overall what will the impact be on other RDS stations? Surely they will get busier. How will this impact on their primary employer? (Alcester resident)

What will happen to Alcester, Bidford and Studley young fire-fighters with the closures? (Alcester young fire-fighter)  
( not allowed to continue debating the point when he kept adding points to the original question)

How long have the plans been in place? (Alcester resident)

Who is taking responsibility for home safety checks?

*The new system will still retain cover moves into key areas to cover such instances and this will be aided as, under the new system, they expect to have more appliances available more of the time.*

*Due to cutting down on attendance at false alarms, they expect there to be an overall drop in the number of call outs so this will not be an issue.*

*There are no intentions to close the young fire-fighters units. They are committed to ensure they remain and expect them to be managed by remaining crews and lay instructors and committed to ensure they have equipment to use and places from which to train.*

*Paul Fuller brought in early February. Various plans were already in place for the modernisation such as joining forces with H&W. This was later scrapped and current model introduced. Paul Fuller did survey of stations and came up with definite plan. Sent out for independent verification. The plan was put to Councillor Hobbs in either early or Mid June (he can't quite remember) and the plans were not fully formulated when he first saw them.*

*On duty crews will continue to take responsibility assisted by the Small Fire units and the voluntary sector who already assist in this matter.*

Questions closed around 8.40 p.m. with the various members remaining to take further questions.