

Bidford-on-Avon Parish Council

IN THE COUNTY OF WARWICKSHIRE

Postal address only:

c/o Bidford-on-Avon Post Office

30 High Street, Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire B50 4AA

Tel/Fax. No. (01789) 778653: Mob. 07718 628925

Website: www.bidfordonavon-pc.gov.uk

Mrs. E. Uggerløse – Clerk to the Parish Council

e-mail – info@bidfordonavon-pc.gov.uk

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service
Improvement Plan consultation
Service Headquarter
Warwick Street
Leamington Spa
CV32 5LH

1st December 2009

Dear Sirs,

Re : Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS) Consultation

I have been instructed by Bidford on Avon Parish Council to let you have its official response to the current consultation document.

Members of the Parish Council have attended a number of meetings, where the various issues regarding the proposals set out in the consultation document, have been discussed, namely:

- Monday 19th October -Presentation made at Bidford by WFRS
- Tuesday 3rd November – Presentation made by WFRS to elected members at Leamington Spa
- Tuesday 11th November - Local Community Forum in Bidford

Furthermore, they had a meeting with Cllr. Hobbs at Shire Hall on Tuesday 27th October.

The Parish Office is situated in Bramley Way, Bidford-on-Avon, B50 4QG
and is open to members of the public 10.00 am – 1.00 pm Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays
and from 1.30-4.30 pm on Thursdays

If you are unable to attend during these times, please call for an appointment.

So, the comments made below will take into account not only the consultation document, but also comments made at the above meetings.

1. The Council finds the document itself to be uninformative, misleading and biased:
 - It is **uninformative** because, although it mentions measures that will, allegedly, improve the service, it gives no information as to how it envisages this will be done. The consultee is a member of the public, not a fireman, and for her/him to be in a position to give a full and reasoned response to the issues raised in the consultation document, he/she needs to be informed: this does not happen.
An example of this is “Duty System”, where the proposal mentions the introduction of a “fifth watch crewing system” – but nowhere does it explain what it actually means and why it should be an improvement. Another is “Hot Fires Training”. Again, no explanation as to what a “hot fire” is
 - It is **misleading** because the only alternatives mentioned are those which are proposed by WFRS, whether these are the best solutions to the problem or not. In other words, the consultee is led to the reply without being given the chance to understand why.
 - It is **biased** because the “appropriate” reply is exactly the response WFRS wish for in order to carry out.
Virtually all the answers to this consultation are biased. Who would not want an improved, more flexible, safer Fire and Rescue Service? So the consultee will automatically circle the Strongly Agree answer; but why? Because the question leads them to this reply – there is no alternative.

It was noted that at the Local Community Forum meeting, Deputy Chief Fire Officer Glen Ranger admitted that “the consultation document could be improved”. To date, the Parish Council has not met a single person who has not criticised the document

2. The Council finds that insufficient information has been made available to allow for a full response. It requested ground information for the stations that were not proposed for closure to be made available, only to be advised that “*We have not produced this information and as such it will not be available*”. In other words it would be impossible to compare the ground information of the stations proposed for closure with that of the stations that would remain open. It requested information regarding response times from all stations for the last 5 years, and received information for the January – August 2009 period only. When questions were raised by concerned residents of the local community at the meetings, it was found these were not answered; the reply was always a standard reference to “resilience, safety and prevention” but not how these would be attained.

The Parish Office is situated in Bramley Way, Bidford-on-Avon, B50 4QG
and is open to members of the public 10.00 am – 1.00 pm Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays
and from 1.30-4.30 pm on Thursdays

If you are unable to attend during these times, please call for an appointment.

3. The Council is extremely concerned about these response times. It has been purported that a fully laden engine can drive from Alcester Fire Station to Bidford Fire Station in less than 6 minutes from the alarm being raised. This has been disputed at every single meeting and, to date, no proof that this is possible has been given. The mention of filmed proof has been made twice, but to date this has not been seen, and local people, who know the area, strongly dispute that this would be possible on a regular basis.
The Council received confirmation from Cllr. Hobbs (Portfolio Holder) that the accepted response times would be 10 minutes for Bidford itself (urban), and 20 minutes for Barton, Broom and Marlcliff (rural). This is 5 minutes more for Bidford and 15 more for Barton, Broom and Marlcliff, as well as surrounding villages currently covered by Bidford Fire Station: where is the improvement? Where is the flexibility? Where is the safety?
4. Cross border – this issue has been raised more in the latter stages of the consultation, when it has become clear that neighbouring fire and rescue services are somewhat appalled at the extent of the cuts proposed by WFRS. It would appear that the current charges made by West Midlands FRS of £250 per appliance, per hour, may extend to Oxford, Hereford and Worcester and others. The Parish Council is aware that there is an obligation to attend in emergencies; the question is, when will our neighbours get fed up having to come and rescue us all the time due to the fact that we do not have sufficient capability? Surely there is an even stronger obligation on WFRS to ensure it is providing sufficient cover for the safety of its community.
5. The Parish Council finds it strange that the consultation document is presented by Paul Fuller QFSM as Chief Fire Officer and Cllr. Richard Hobbs as Portfolio Holder of Community Protection, when all of Warwickshire is aware that the current Chief Fire Officer, and the one who would implement any changes, is Graeme Smith. Was Mr. Paul Fuller so concerned at the response he would receive from the people of Warwickshire that he left before the consultation was completed?
And, when Chief Fire Officer Smith attended the meeting in Bidford on 19th October, it was revealed he had not even visited the station! Strange indeed, to propose the closure of a Fire Station without even visiting the locality, see how the station works, who it protects, talk to its crew; simply get a feel of the situation.

As it has mentioned in previous correspondence, Bidford on Avon is totally opposed to the closure of the fire stations in the south of the county. It is in principle opposed to any closure but feels it has less knowledge of the circumstances north of the county, although it would mention that if this draconian cut is carried out, Warwickshire, a county with a growing population (especially elderly) and many miles of motorway/dual carriage way for its size,

The Parish Office is situated in Bramley Way, Bidford-on-Avon, B50 4QG
and is open to members of the public 10.00 am – 1.00 pm Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays
and from 1.30-4.30 pm on Thursdays

If you are unable to attend during these times, please call for an appointment.

will become the **SMALLEST FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE IN MAINLAND UK**. The Parish Council would like to stress the fact that a fire and rescue service is an **EMERGENCY** service, and any cut to this must not be taken lightly, as any margin of error can result in death.


So, bearing in mind what Chief Fire Officer Smith said: “if you don’t like what is proposed, give us something to think on”; what Cllr. Hobbs said “prove to us that you have a better idea” and what John Maples MP said “leave emotion to one side and think with your brain”, Bidford on Avon would like to support the alternative **“Local Solution”** presented by Bill Fleming, a resident from Bidford, at the at the Local Community Forum on November 11th, a copy of which is attached hereto.

This alternative **“Local Solution”** has been well thought out and would indeed provide South Warwickshire with a “Fitter, Stronger Fire and Rescue Service”, and it would cost less.

Bidford on Avon Parish Council, the elected representatives of the communities of Barton, Bidford on Avon, Broom and Marlcliff trust you will give this alternative your very strong consideration, and that you will agree with the local electorate that this really **IS** a better way forward.

The message is **THINK BEFORE YOU CUT – IT COULD SAVE LIVES**

Yours sincerely



Elisabeth Uggerløse
Clerk to the Parish Council



The Parish Office is situated in Bramley Way, Bidford-on-Avon, B50 4QG
and is open to members of the public 10.00 am – 1.00 pm Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays
and from 1.30-4.30 pm on Thursdays
If you are unable to attend during these times, please call for an appointment.