



Wiltshire
Fire & Rescue
Service

Strengthening our Fire & Rescue Service

Public Consultation
2014



Foreword



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Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority

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Thank you for your interest in reading this leaflet in which we are asking your opinions on important choices for Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority.

Our Fire Authority is one of the most cost-effective in the country and has been very successful in making savings in the face of reduced funding from central government. However, the longer term financial forecast remains bleak and this could significantly threaten front-line services if nothing else is done to make the necessary savings. Over the next few years, we have to make large savings that are unachievable unless we are prepared to do things differently.

Because we are proud of serving our communities and helping young and old alike, we are considering and consulting on a range of options to help to solve our financial problems and strengthen the work we do.

In summary, the key choices we have are to what extent Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority should collaborate with Dorset Fire Authority, or whether the two authorities should merge into a single Combined Fire Authority for Wiltshire, Swindon and Dorset. There are also possibilities of increased collaboration or integration of some fire and rescue support functions with local authorities, the police and the ambulance service. All of these choices involve working differently; but we believe the right one(s) will help protect our front-line services to the public.

No decisions have been made and we are consulting widely on all the main issues – so please make your views count by taking part: we look forward to hearing from you.

The outcomes of the consultation process will be taken fully into account when the Fire Authority makes its decision in November 2014.

Please complete the short questionnaire in this leaflet or on-line and return it to the address given. (You do not have to pay for postage.) We hope that you will take this opportunity to have your say on this proposal.

“We are really proud of the work we do to help keep people safe. Our priority is to protect front-line services.”

Introduction

Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service is comprised of full-time and on-call (retained) firefighters and corporate staff. The governing body of the organisation is the Fire Authority, comprised of 13 elected councillors nominated from Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council. The Fire Authority sets not only the overall strategy, but also the budget and the council tax charge for the Fire & Rescue Service; and it holds the Chief Fire Officer to account for the delivery of the emergency response and prevention services.

In contrast to fire authorities in heavily populated urban and metropolitan areas, the Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority receives only about 40% of its funding from the Government, whereas about 60% is raised from local council tax. For a Band D household it costs £63.62 per year to fund the fire and rescue service (which works out at only £1.22 per week).

Since 2011, central government funding to many public bodies has been reduced progressively – by an average of about 25% over four years – and council tax increases have been frozen or restricted to small amounts.

The Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority currently has a budget of £25 million (for 2014-2015) and will have made savings totalling £4.7 million by the end of 2014 - 2015 (over four years, since 2010 - 2011). But the Authority still has to make further on-going savings of between £3.1 million and £3.9 million each year by the end of March 2018.



“We would like your views before we make a decision in November 2014.”

Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority and Dorset Fire Authority have worked together to identify seven strategic options for the future of both authorities. More information on the options can be found in the Strategic Options Appraisal. In this context, this document outlines some key choices which have been jointly developed by both Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority and Dorset Fire Authority to provide various levels of savings. Both Fire Authorities are considering these matters in parallel because they face similar financial challenges.

The issues for consultation are important and we wish to ask you about them. There are important questions about the future relationship of the two authorities - whether they should remain separate, how much Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority should co-operate with Dorset Fire Authority, or whether the two authorities should merge to form a single Combined Fire Authority? All options involve increasing the level of collaboration with local councils, the police and other services.

Both Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority and Dorset Fire Authority are now separately considering these issues to determine which are the most and least acceptable to you, and which will achieve the biggest savings in order to avoid service reductions. No decisions have been made yet, but important choices have to be made – so please read this leaflet carefully and let us know your views. Both fire authorities will consider carefully the outcomes of the consultation in the context of all the other evidence before making their decisions on the way(s) forward in November 2014.

Important facts about us

- ▶ Attends incidents and provides services to Wiltshire and Swindon, where around 684,000 people live.
- ▶ Attends over 6,100 incidents each year.
- ▶ Have 24 fire stations, one crewed by full-time firefighters, five crewed by full-time and on-call firefighters and 18 crewed by on-call firefighters.
- ▶ Work with volunteers and with local community groups to organise and run a wide range of safety initiatives.
- ▶ Employ just over 600 people with a budget of £25 million.
- ▶ Our service costs £63.62 a year (£1.22 a week per household) if you are a Band D householder.

Scenarios for the future

Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority and Dorset Fire Authority are in many ways comparable:

- ▶ Their counties are largely rural and of broadly similar size
- ▶ They have similar budgets and council tax precepts
- ▶ They have a similar number of fire stations and full-time emergency resources
- ▶ Both have to cover large rural areas effectively with on-call (retained) firefighters drawn from the community
- ▶ They both work together well and are currently cooperating to develop a Joint Command and Control Centre to deal with emergency calls
- ▶ Overall, they are two of the most cost-effective fire and rescue services in the country
- ▶ But both have to make challenging financial savings over the next few years.

The main issues about the future of the two fire authorities are expressed in the following scenarios:

1 **Remain independent and increase collaboration with local partners**

Should Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority and the fire and rescue service remain separate and independent, as they are now? In Wiltshire this will also mean increased collaboration with local partners such as Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council.

2 **Remain independent and increase collaboration with Dorset Fire Authority and local partners**

Should the two fire authorities remain separate and independent, with their fire and rescue services working more closely with each other? In Wiltshire and Dorset this would also mean increased collaboration with local partners, including Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council, Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole.

3 **Merge with Dorset Fire Authority and increase collaboration with local partners**

Should the two fire authorities merge to create a single fire authority and fire and rescue service? In Wiltshire and Dorset this would mean increased collaboration with local partners, including Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council, Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole.



Scenario 1

Remain independent and increase collaboration with local partners:

Should Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority and the fire and rescue service remain separate and independent, as they are now? In Wiltshire this will also mean increased collaboration with local partners such as Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council.

Under scenario 1 the fire authority would continue as a separate organisation. It would continue to be governed by a committee of elected councillors; have a Chief Fire Officer and a team of senior officers; and have corporate teams (such as Human Resources, Finance, ICT and other functions). Their independence would not prevent them from co-operating on specific projects with other fire and rescue services, such as the Joint Command and Control Centre.

Increased collaboration with Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council and other partners would need to save between £3.1 and £3.9 million each year by 2018 for Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority. Preliminary work indicates that this scenario could provide savings for Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority in the region of £0.8 million each year from sharing teams and corporate costs.

“No decisions have been made and we are consulting widely on all the main issues.”

We will be working with our partners to confirm our estimations and this work will be considered by the fire authority alongside the feedback from this consultation at their November meeting. Legal agreements and contracts covering liabilities and risks may need to be put in place to achieve these savings.

Further savings of between £2.3 million and £3.1 million may still need to be achieved each year by 2018. This would require significant changes in working arrangements and front-line service reductions (potentially including longer response times, reductions in the number of firefighters and less capacity for community safety and education activities).

Scenario 2

Remain independent and increase collaboration with Dorset Fire Authority and local partners:

Should the two fire authorities remain separate and independent, with their fire and rescue services working more closely with each other? In Wiltshire and Dorset this would also mean increased collaboration with local partners, including Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council, Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole.

As in scenario 1, the fire authority would continue as a separate organisation. It would continue to be governed by a committee of elected councillors; have a Chief Fire Officer and a team of senior officers; and have corporate teams (such as Human Resources, Finance, ICT and other functions). Their independence would not prevent them from co-operating on specific projects with other fire and rescue services, such as the Joint Command and Control Centre.

However, under scenario 2, Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority and Dorset Fire Authority would look for opportunities to collaborate both together and with Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council, Wiltshire Police and other partners.

This scenario could provide similar levels of annual savings for Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority as scenario 1 from sharing teams and corporate costs. The sharing of fire specialist support between the two fire services will increase resilience, allow us to realise savings quickly and will provide further opportunities for collaboration with partners. Legal agreements and contracts covering liabilities and risks may need to be put in place to achieve these savings.

Further savings of between £2.3 million and £3.1 million may still need to be achieved each year by 2018. This would require significant changes in working arrangements and front-line service reductions (potentially including longer response times, reductions in the number of firefighters and less capacity for community safety and education activities).



Scenario 3

Merge with Dorset Fire Authority and increase collaboration with local partners

Should the two fire authorities merge to create a single combined fire authority and fire and rescue service? In Wiltshire and Dorset this would also mean increased collaboration with local partners, including Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council, Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole.

Under scenario 3 Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority and Dorset Fire Authority would merge into a single organisation, governed by a single (combined) committee of elected councillors, with a single Chief Fire Officer and an integrated team of officers and support staff. The firefighters providing emergency cover and the corporate staff for Human Resources, Finance, ICT and other functions would be combined in a single organisation.



With a single combined fire authority, the development of a joint Command and Control Centre would continue and would reflect the integration of the organisation within a single authority. Such mergers are not unknown: Devon and Somerset Fire Authorities combined into a single organisation for both counties in 2007; and more recently East and West Sussex came close to merging. In Scotland, eight fire and rescue services have recently merged into a single authority covering a population of over five million.

Nonetheless, a merger of the two existing fire authorities would be a change to the existing organisation and governance structures in Wiltshire, Swindon and Dorset. However, the new authority would still have to answer to local people – as elected members from Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council would be part of a combined fire authority, and the number of councillors representing these councils on the new fire authority would not change. A merger would not mean the loss of local identities for firefighters and important symbols of identity (such as badges) would remain.

Scenario 3 would provide by far the biggest financial saving whilst best protecting the levels of emergency service across Wiltshire and Swindon as well as Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset. This is because it will enable both services to maximise savings from working with local councils and other partners as well as the money we spend on fire specialisms within the two services. For example it has been calculated that from their combined current annual budgets of £55 million, a merger of the two fire authorities could save in the region of £4 million per year for the merged fire authority. This figure is achieved by maximising savings from fire specialist areas that are not available under the other two scenarios.

These savings would still leave a 'gap' for the merged authority of between £1.4 and £3.1 million per year by 2018; however, with a larger pool of full-time firefighters who would be under the same contractual arrangements we should be able to develop and deliver more resilient and efficient crewing arrangements. Subject to more detailed analysis over the coming weeks, early indications suggest further savings of up to £1.5 million would be potentially available.

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How will the final decision be made?

The final decision on the future of both fire authorities will depend on a number of important issues being dealt with satisfactorily. These include:

- ▶ What you say in your feedback
- ▶ The full business case and financial implications
- ▶ The effects on community safety
- ▶ Whether we receive political support.

The consultation period runs from 21st July to 20th October 2014 – so please make sure your views count by taking part. When the two fire authorities have considered the outcomes of the consultation in the context of all the other evidence, they will make their decisions in November.

If they were both to recommend a merger then by early 2015 an application would be made to the Government for a Combination Order under the Fire & Rescue Service Act 2004.



Taking part in the consultation

We are keen to get your views. You can take part in this consultation in a number of ways:

- ▶ By completing the short questionnaire with this leaflet and return it to the address given (you do not have to pay for postage)
- ▶ By visiting our website and completing our questionnaire online at <http://www.wiltsfire.gov.uk/potentialcombinationwithdorset>

You can also find more detailed documents on the proposal by either visiting our website at: <http://www.wiltsfire.gov.uk/potentialcombinationwithdorset> or by phoning our consultation helpline **08000 352077**. Or you can email us at fire.consultation@gmail.com. We would be happy to provide you with paper copies if that would help you.

This is your opportunity to help shape the future of your fire & rescue service – so please complete this questionnaire and return it in the FREEPOST envelope provided, to arrive no later than 20 October 2014. Anyone aged 16 or over can take part, as can representatives from business, public and voluntary organisations and fire & rescue service staff.

Privacy Statement: All responses are treated confidentially and are only seen by Opinion Research Services who have been commissioned to support and analyse responses on behalf of Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority, Dorset Fire Authority and Delib (who are the website hosts and are the data processors).

“We have to make large savings that are unachievable unless we are prepared to do things differently.”

If you would like this leaflet in large print, a different form or help to translate it, please contact the Consultation Helpline on **08000 352077**, mobile on **07765 897591** or email **fire.consultation@gmail.com**

If you want us to translate this leaflet, please contact us using the above telephone number

यदि तपाईं यो पर्चालाई हामीबाट अनुवाद गराउन चाहनु हुन्छ भने, कृपया माथिको टेलिफोन नम्बरको प्रयोग गरेर हामीलाई सम्पर्क गर्नुहोस् ।


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