



Dorset
Fire & Rescue
Service

Strengthening our fire and rescue service

Public consultation
2014



Foreword



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Thank you for your interest in reading this leaflet in which we are asking your opinions on important choices for Dorset Fire Authority and thereafter the Dorset Fire and Rescue Service.

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. The longer term financial forecast is still bleak as Government has intimated future cuts to grant will be required. This could significantly threaten front-line services if nothing else is done to make the necessary savings. Despite realising substantial savings over the past four years, we still have to find large-scale savings that we cannot achieve unless we are prepared to do things differently.

We are proud of serving our communities and helping young and old alike, so are considering and consulting on a range of scenarios to help us address our financial problems and strengthen the work we do.

In summary, the main choices we have are to what extent we should collaborate with Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority, or whether the two authorities should merge into a single combined fire authority covering the constituent areas of Bournemouth, Dorset, Poole, Swindon and Wiltshire. There are also opportunities for increased collaboration of some fire and rescue support functions with local authorities, the police and the ambulance service. All of these choices involve working differently. However, we believe the right one or indeed mix will help protect our front-line services to the public.

We have not made any decisions yet 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.

We will carefully consider the outcomes of the consultation process when we make our decision in November 2014.

Please fill in the short questionnaire in this leaflet or online 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

Dorset Fire and 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, which is made up of 15 elected councillors chosen from Bournemouth Borough Council (4), Dorset County Council (8) and the Borough of Poole (3). The Fire Authority sets not only the overall strategy, but also the budget and the Fire Authority precept (charged with your council tax) for the Fire and Rescue Service. It also holds the Chief Fire Officer to account for delivering the many functions, including emergency response and prevention services.

In contrast to fire authorities in heavily populated towns and cities, we receive only about 40% of our funding from the Government, whereas about 60% is raised from local council tax. For a Band D household, it costs £66.60 a year to fund the Fire and Rescue Service, which works out at only £1.28 a week.

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

We currently have a budget of £30 million (for 2014/15) and since 2005 we are on track to have saved over £4 million per year and avoided cuts to front-line services, but we still have to make further ongoing savings of between £2.3-£3.2 million each year by the end of March 2018 to be able to maintain current service levels.



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

Important facts about us

- Attend incidents and provides services to Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole where around 744,000 people live.
- Attend over 8,500 incidents each year.
- Have 26 fire stations, seven crewed by full-time and on-call firefighters and 19 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 800 people with a budget of just over £30 million.
- Our service costs £66.60 a year (£1.28 a week per household) if you are a band D householder.

We have worked with Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority to identify three scenarios for the future of both authorities. This document outlines some important choices which have been jointly developed by us to provide various levels of savings. Both fire authorities are considering these matters now because we face similar financial challenges.

The issues for consultation are important and we would like your views. There are important questions about the future relationship of the two authorities - whether we should stay separate, how much we should co-operate with Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority, and whether the two authorities should merge to form a single combined fire authority. All scenarios involve increasing the level of collaboration with local councils, the police and other services.

We will be considering these issues separately following your feedback on which are the most and least acceptable choices. We will also be considering which will achieve the biggest savings in order to limit service reductions.

We have not made any decisions 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 decisions on the way forward in November 2014.

Scenarios for the future

In many ways, we and Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority are similar:

- Our counties are largely rural and of broadly similar size with significant urban centres.
- We have similar budgets and council tax precepts.
- We 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 from the community.
- We both work together well and are currently co-operating to develop a joint command and control centre to deal with emergency calls.
- Overall, we are two of the most cost-effective fire and rescue services in the country.
- We both have to make challenging financial savings over the next few years.

The main issues about the future of our fire authority are outlined in the following scenarios.

1 Dorset Fire Authority to stay independent and increase collaboration with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole

Should the Dorset Fire Authority and its fire and rescue service stay separate and independent, as it is now, and increase collaboration with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council, the Borough of Poole and other partners?

2 Dorset Fire Authority to stay independent and increase collaboration with Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority while also collaborating with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole

Should the fire authorities stay separate and independent, with the fire and rescue services collaborating more closely with each other and increase collaboration with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council, the Borough of Poole and other partners?

3 Dorset Fire Authority to merge with Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority to create a single Combined Fire Authority while also collaborating with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council, the Borough of Poole, Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council

Should the two fire authorities merge to create a single fire authority and fire and rescue service and increase collaboration with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council, the Borough of Poole, Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council and other partners?

Scenario 1

Dorset Fire Authority to stay independent and increase collaboration with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole

Should the Dorset Fire Authority and its fire and rescue service stay separate and independent, as it is now, and increase collaboration with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole and other partners?

Under scenario 1 Dorset Fire Authority and the Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority would continue as separate organisations. We would be governed by our respective Fire Authority of elected councillors nominated from the Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole. We would have a Chief Fire Officer and a team of senior officers, and our own corporate teams (such as Human Resources, Finance, ICT and other functions). Being independent would not prevent us from co-operating on specific projects. Under this scenario, critical decisions, such as those on service reductions, would continue to be taken locally within Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole.

Increased collaboration with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole and other partners would need to make substantial savings for us by 2018. Financial projections indicate that savings would need to be in the region of £2.3 and £3.2 million each year on top of the savings already made. Initial work indicates savings in the region of £0.8 million a year could be available from sharing teams and corporate costs, and further savings remain to be explored and quantified.

We will be working with our partners to develop our estimates and we will consider this work alongside the feedback from this consultation at our November meeting. Legal agreements and contracts covering liabilities and risks would be required to achieve some of the savings.

If as indicated funding for the Dorset Fire Authority continues to reduce and increases in Fire Authority precepts remain capped, then under this scenario we may still need to make further savings of up to £2.4 million on top of the £0.8 million. This would need significant changes in working arrangements and probable reductions in front-line services, possibly resulting in longer response times.

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

Scenario 2

Dorset Fire Authority to stay independent and increase collaboration with Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority while also collaborating with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole

Should the two fire authorities stay separate and independent, with our fire and rescue services collaborating more closely with each other and increase collaboration with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole and other partners?

As in scenario 1, we would continue as a separate organisation. We would continue to be governed by a committee of elected councillors nominated from Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole. We would have a Chief Fire Officer and a team of senior officers, and corporate teams (such as Human Resources, Finance, ICT and other functions). Being independent would not prevent us from co-operating on specific projects with other fire and rescue services. Under this scenario, critical decisions, such as those on service reductions, would continue to be taken locally within Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole.

This scenario allows each fire service to share services, which will realise savings more quickly, increase resilience and provide further opportunities for collaboration with more partners. Collaboration with Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority would be limited to sharing non-operational teams, corporate costs and maximising non-operational fire specialisms. Legal agreements and contracts covering liabilities and risks would need to be put in place to achieve these savings. This is because we would both remain as separate legal entities.

Initial work indicates that increased collaboration with Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority while also collaborating with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole and other partners could provide annual savings in the region of £0.9 million for us.

As under scenario 1, if funding for the Dorset Fire Authority continues to reduce and increases in Fire Authority precepts remain capped, then under this scenario further savings in the region of £2 million may still need to be achieved beyond the £0.9 million already identified. This would be likely to result in significant changes in working arrangements, and reductions in front-line services, possibly resulting in longer response times.



Scenario 3

Dorset Fire Authority to merge with Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority to create a single Combined Fire Authority while also collaborating with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council, the Borough of Poole, Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council

Should the two fire authorities merge to create a single fire authority and fire and rescue service and increase collaboration with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council, the Borough of Poole, Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council and other partners?

Under scenario 3 we and Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority would merge into one organisation, governed by a single (combined) committee of elected councillors, with one 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 one fire and rescue service.

Such mergers are not unknown, Devon and Somerset Fire Authorities combined into a single organisation for both counties in 2007, and in Scotland, eight fire and rescue services have recently merged into a single authority covering a population of over five million.

A merger of two fire authorities would be a change to the existing organisation and governance structures in Dorset, Bournemouth, Poole Wiltshire and Swindon. A new combined fire authority could comprise of 28 elected Members who would have a number of councillors based upon their respective population size and in fact would be the same as the existing nominations for each individual fire authority. This could mean the number of councillors on this new authority would be Bournemouth (4), Dorset (8), Poole (3), Wiltshire (9) and Swindon (4). A merger would not mean losing local identities for firefighters and important symbols of identity (such as badges) could stay the same and we would maintain a clear local connection with the communities we serve.

“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.”

More work has been done on Scenario 3 than on the others, and on present information, it provides the greatest financial saving and currently is the preferred option of the Dorset Fire Authority. 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 our 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 new fire authority. This figure is achieved by making the most of savings from fire specialist areas that are not available under the other two scenarios. Furthermore as a larger and more resilient organisation it provides scope for further savings in areas not yet fully explored.

As with the previous scenarios, if funding for the new fire authority continues to reduce and increases in fire authority precepts remain capped, then this scenario also results in a combined funding gap of between £1.4 and £3.1 million per year by 2018. Although 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. Depending on more detailed analysis over the coming weeks, early indications suggest further savings of up to £1.5 million would possibly be available without impacting on our response arrangements. This would still leave a remaining financial gap which would be likely to call for changes in working arrangements and minor changes to front-line service could not be ruled out.

Scenario	Potential Level of savings
Dorset Fire Authority stay independent and increase collaboration with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole	At least £0.8 million for Dorset Fire and Rescue Service
Dorset Fire Authority stay independent and increase collaboration with Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority while also collaborating with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole	At least £0.9 million for Dorset Fire and Rescue Service
Dorset Fire Authority merge with Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority to create a single Combined Fire Authority while also collaborating with Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council, the Borough of Poole, Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council	At least £4 million collective savings for a new combined fire and rescue service covering Dorset and Wiltshire & Swindon

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; and
- whether we receive political support.

The consultation period runs from 21 July to 20 October 2014 – so please make sure your views count by taking part.

When we have considered the outcomes of the consultation, we will make our decisions in November.

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



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 filling in 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.dorsetfire.gov.uk/working-with-us/about-us/strengthening-our-fire-and-rescue-service/>

You can also find more detailed documents on the proposal by either visiting our website at: <http://www.dorsetfire.gov.uk/working-with-us/about-us/strengthening-our-fire-and-rescue-service/> or by phoning our consultation helpline on **08000 352077**. Or you can email us at fire.consultation@gmail.com. We would be happy to send you a paper copy if that would help.

This is your opportunity to help shape the future of your Fire and Rescue Service – so please fill in this questionnaire and return it in the FREEPOST envelope provided. It needs 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 and rescue service staff.

Privacy Statement: We will treat responses confidentially and they will be only seen by Opinion Research Services who we have asked to analyse responses on our behalf and for 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 document in large print, a different format or help to translate it, please contact the Consultation Helpline on 08000 352077, mobile on 07765 897591 or email at fire.consultation@gmail.com

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Dacă doriți ne să traducem acest prospect, vă rugăm să ne contactați folosind numărul de telephone mai sus

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如果您希望我们翻译这本小册子，请使用上面的telephone号联系我们

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 fire.consultation@gmail.com

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