

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service - Briefing Note for Plymouth City Council
(Scrutiny Committee)

Details of planned major changes to service delivery where the changes have the potential to impact on partners and communities e.g. through reduction in spend, significant changes to targets and level of service delivery or location of delivery.

The financial settlement for DSFRS, as with other local authorities, remains challenging. However proposals agreed in 2013 mean that there are no new significant changes planned for Plymouth in 2014. Implementation of the arrangements agreed in 2013 will however continue to be rolled out in a phased manner.

It was simply not possible to provide detailed information to this public meeting last year as briefings for staff and the media had been planned in advance and it was important that staff became aware of the changes needed from senior management first. It should be noted that the papers were required for this meeting some time in advance and at the stage of drafting, it was not possible to share information more widely. The paper that was provided however, did clearly indicate both the context and the principles that were being applied. Furthermore, once the proposals were in the public domain, Plymouth City Council did scrutinise the proposals and submitted comments as part of the consultation.

Context setting – national requirements and policy drivers

Financial Context –The Government announced in December 2012 that the Government Grant for Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Service will be reduced by 10.3% in 2013 and a further 7.3% in 2014. We are also planning on a further reduction of 10% in 2015 as announced in the Chancellor’s 2013 spending round in July. Whilst we do not know what savings will be applied beyond 2015, our medium term financial planning is based upon further significant reductions in grant.

The 2013 spending round also announced £75 million of funds for 2015 -16 to be made available to fire and rescue authorities on a bid-for basis. The funds will support transformational change and delivery of further efficiencies by fire and rescue authorities. We will be exploring opportunities to work collaboratively with other emergency services to attract some of this funding.

Headline budget messages – key areas of budget reduction and likely impact on partners and service users, performance against high level delivery of efficiency plans.

Our budget for 2014/15 will not be set until February 2014 however it is forecast that savings of over £3m will be needed to set a balanced budget. These savings can be achieved from the implementation of the changes agreed by the Fire Authority in 2013, and continued efficiency from non-operational budgets. We do not therefore intend to make further changes to the crewing of fire stations in Plymouth in 2014.

Risks and issues to delivering the city priorities including plans to tackle any underperformance and highlight areas of challenge where dependent on partners to resolve issues.

We continue to aim to reduce fire deaths/injuries and road deaths/injuries across Devon and Somerset. In doing so, we need to work even more closely with partners, including Plymouth City Council, who often have information and/or access to those most at risk. Many of the factors associated with those most at risk of dying in a fire are common to those most vulnerable in society such as ill health dependency, mental health, drug/alcohol dependency and the frail/elderly.

DSFRS welcomes the opportunity to help support Plymouth City Council realise their 'Plan' for Plymouth. We feel that we will be able to do things which will help reach the objectives outlined in the plan and we especially welcome and support the stated outcome of prioritising prevention, as this is something we also feel passionate about. As an example we target our fire safety and prevention services at those that we know are most vulnerable from fire. It is for this reason that we are currently looking to work much more closely with PCC to understand, support and improve safety arrangements specifically associated with dementia and mental health because we know that this is a growing area for concern for all partners and the community. We also continue to work even more closely with Directors of Public Health as we have a contribution to make to improving safety of people in their homes (reducing slips, trips and falls), helping the elderly to maintain their independence as well as assisting those with alcohol and drug dependency.

Our commitment to helping ensure that people are treated with dignity and respect is demonstrated by way of continuing to second an officer to the Plymouth and Devon Race Equality Council in order to assist us focus our time, effort and advice in those areas where people are most at risk, including migrant workers and those who do not have English as their first language. As on previous years we assisted in the Plymouth Respect! Festival this year.

We support the wise use of resources particularly where we see the opportunity for more effective working and better outcomes for the city and our communities. One such opportunity emerged recently and we have now seconded an officer Plymouth City Council's Emergency Planning team for a year to cover a staff short fall caused by sickness and maternity leave. Though they will be part of the Emergency Planning team and will get involved in all aspects of the role their main focus will be covering licenced sites e.g. COMAH sites and other licenced high risk areas. There are already clear links between the Fire and Rescue Service and partners including Plymouth City Council in planning for emergencies and licensing these sites and we expect to see additional benefits for all from closer working, understanding and through reducing duplication.

One of our officers has also recently spent a couple of months seconded to PCC to complete a scoping exercise to provide initial details of current common work streams and activities suitable for DSFRS staff to be placed, seconded or work jointly with PCC staff. Our Officer met with numerous managers from PCC who were operating in a wide spectrum of Departments and teams in an effort to determine the areas where the most benefit would be derived in terms of improved outcomes in public safety, reduced societal costs and impacts whilst also providing added value and benefits for both PCC and DSFRS. As a result of this work we have agreed to second an officer into Plymouth City Council's housing & regeneration team to assist improve the safety of Houses in Multiple Occupation and we are currently looking at how we could best second an officer into Youth Services which is another area that it is felt that we could add value to the already excellent work PCC teams are engaged in.

Critical risks to delivering services provided in partnership; including areas of support required from partners to improve delivery and identification of blockages.

We remain dependent on the close working relationships with PCC to best protect the public of Devon and Somerset. Access to data, key managers and joint initiatives to further improve the life chances and safety of Plymouth residents will remain a top priority for this Service.