



Wiltshire  
Fire & Rescue  
Service

# Strengthening our Fire & Rescue Service

Public Consultation  
2014



# Foreword



**Cllr Chris Devine** (above right)  
*Chairman*  
Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority

**Simon Routh-Jones** (above left)  
*Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive*  
Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service

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. The longer term financial forecast remains 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 4 years, we still have to find large scale 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 scenarios 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 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 carefully considered 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 Fire Authority precept (charged with your council tax) 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 anticipates having to make further on-going savings of between £3.1 million and £3.9 million each year by the end of March 2018, to offset projected future central grant reductions.



*“We would like your views before we make a decision 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.

Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority and Dorset Fire Authority have worked together to identify three strategic options for the future of both authorities. 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 now 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, 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.

Both Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority and Dorset Fire Authority will be separately considering these issues following your feedback on which are the most and least acceptable. They will also be considering which will achieve the biggest savings in order to limit 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 forward in November 2014.

# 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 with significant urban centres
- ▶ 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 our fire authority are expressed in the following scenarios:

## 1 **Remain independent and increase collaboration with Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council**

Should the two fire authorities and fire and rescue services remain separate and independent, as they are now, and increase collaboration with Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council and other partners?

## 2 **Remain independent and increase collaboration with Dorset Fire Authority while also collaborating with Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council**

Should the two fire authorities remain separate and independent, with their fire and rescue services collaborating more closely with each other and increase collaboration with Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council and other partners?

## 3 **Merge with Dorset Fire Authority to create a single Combined Fire Authority while also collaborating with 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 Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council and other partners?



## Scenario 1

### **Remain independent and increase collaboration with Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council:**

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.

Within scenario 1 the two fire authorities would continue as separate organisations. Both would be governed by their respective fire authority of elected Wiltshire and Swindon Borough councillors; both would have a Chief Fire Officer and a team of senior officers; and both would have their own corporate teams (such as Human Resources, Finance, ICT and other functions). Their independence would not prevent them from co-operating on specific projects. Under this scenario, critical decisions, such as those on service reductions, would continue to be taken locally within Wiltshire and Swindon.

Increased collaboration with Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council and other partners would need to make substantial savings for Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority by 2018. Initial work already indicates savings in the region of £0.8 million a year from sharing teams and corporate costs, and further savings remain to be explored and quantified.

We will be sharing information with our partners to develop our estimates 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 some of the savings.

If as indicated funding for the Combined Fire Authority continues to reduce and increases in Fire Authority precepts remains capped, then under this scenario further savings of up to £3.1 million may still need to be achieved on top of the £0.8 million. This would require significant changes in working arrangements and probable front-line service reductions, potentially resulting in longer response times.

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

## Scenario 2

### **Remain independent and increase collaboration with Dorset Fire Authority while also collaborating with Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council:**

Should Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority and the fire and rescue service remain separate and independent and increase collaboration with Dorset Fire Authority and work more closely with Dorset Fire and Rescue Service? In Wiltshire this will also mean increased collaboration with local partners such as Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council?

As in scenario 1, the fire authority would continue as a separate organisation. It would continue to be governed by a fire authority of elected Wiltshire and Swindon Borough 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. Under this scenario, critical decisions, such as those on service reductions, would continue to be taken locally within Wiltshire and Swindon.

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

Initial work indicates that increased collaboration with Dorset Fire Authority while also collaborating with Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council and other partners could provide annual savings in the region of £0.9 million for Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority, and we also believe more future savings can be realised in using this proposal.

As under scenario 1, if funding for the Combined Fire Authority continues to reduce and increases in Fire Authority precepts remains capped, then under this scenario further savings in the region of £3 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 front-line service reductions could not be ruled out.



### Scenario 3

#### **Merge with Dorset Fire Authority to create a single Combined Fire Authority while also collaborating with Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council:**

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?

Within 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.

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.

Nonetheless, a merger of two fire authorities would be a change to the existing organisation and governance structures in Wiltshire, Swindon and Dorset. A new Combined Fire Authority could comprise of 28 elected Members who would have a number of councillors based upon their respective population size. This could mean the number of councillors on this new Authority would be Wiltshire (9), Swindon (4), Bournemouth (4), Dorset (8) and Poole (3). A merger would not mean the loss of local identities for firefighters and important symbols of identity (such as badges) would remain.

*“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. 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 which includes the savings for the present Dorset Fire Authority. This figure is achieved by maximising savings from fire specialist areas that are not available under the other two scenarios.

As under the previous scenarios, if funding for the Combined 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. Subject to more detailed analysis over the coming weeks, early indications suggest further savings of up to £1.5million would be potentially available. This would still leave a remaining financial gap which would be likely to call for changes in working arrangements, front-line service reductions could not be ruled out.

<b>Scenario</b>	<b>Potential Level of savings</b>
<b>Remain independent and increase collaboration with Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council</b>	<b>At least £0.8 million</b> Within Wiltshire & Swindon
<b>Remain independent and increase collaboration with Dorset Fire Authority while also collaborating with Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council</b>	<b>At least £0.9 million</b> Within Wiltshire & Swindon
<b>Merge with Dorset Fire Authority to create a single Combined Fire Authority while also collaborating with Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council</b>	<b>At least £4 million joint savings</b> Within a combined Wiltshire & Swindon and Dorset

# 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 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 an application would be made to the Government for a Combination Order under the Fire & Rescue Service 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 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.wiltshire.gov.uk/strengtheningourfrs>

For more information visit our website at:

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/strengtheningourfrs>

or by phoning our consultation helpline **08000 352077**.

Or you can email us at [fire.consultation@gmail.com](mailto:fire.consultation@gmail.com).

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

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