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## Press Release – 9 January 2024

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### WARWICKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE FIRE STATION CLOSURE PROPOSALS

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#### **FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES ASSOCIATION STATEMENT ON WARWICKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE'S CONSULTATION ON 'RESOURCING TO RISK'**

On 8<sup>th</sup> December Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service launched its 'Resourcing to Risk' consultation. Their proposals included the removal of the on-call duty system, the effective closure of seven fire stations, and the reduction of fire engines potentially available across the county from 23 during the day and 21 at night, to 12 during the day and 8 at night. They also proposed creating 'surge' teams based on the 'mothballed' stations which would be available four times in five years, to deal with 'surge' incidents. There would be a response of 30 minutes to 4 hours from these stations. It is unlikely that they would be crewed by locally based personnel.

It was recognised prior to the launch that these proposals were untenable. There was no way in which such a reduction in the number of fire engines could be remotely sensible. And so, it has now transpired. January is not even a quarter of the way through, and two significant incidents have occurred. The recent flooding resulted in 82 emergency calls for assistance, and a night fire at the Hospital of St Cross in Rugby tied up five fire engines. If the fire and rescue service's proposals were to go ahead this one incident would have left just three engines available to cover the whole of Warwickshire, including the one fire engine that covers the whole of south Warwickshire at night.

Belatedly recognising this, it now appears that there has been a significant change of tack by the fire and rescue service. They now say that the surge engines would be used in these type of incidents – not once in a 'blue moon' - but clearly on a regular basis. This fundamentally undermines the proposals on which they are now consulting. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0qz3l8w>

The surge team concept appears to have been developed on the notion of 'rising tide' events, where a gradual increase in resources is required to supplement or replace existing resources in a controlled manner. They were not designed to provide additional cover when significant resources are urgently required to deal a single incident such as the hospital fire, or with simultaneous smaller incidents. The existing on-call system however does this admirably.

The costs of resourcing the surge teams will now, obviously, significantly increase. The measly £14,000 savings the service promised will rapidly disappear if these teams are being called out on a regular basis. As important, the service is now effectively saying it is replacing the on-call duty system, with another form of on-call based on whole and part-time workers on their rest days, who will be used on a regular basis and not be

held in reserve for the most resource intensive events. It is plain that this will be as precarious, if not more so, than they currently claim the existing on-call duty system is.

What is blindingly clear is that they have got their modelling, and therefore their sums wrong. The model they are currently consulting on is not the one they now say, in the harsh face of reality, they will operate. They should suspend the consultation.

Tristan Ashby, Chief Executive of the Fire and Rescue Association said:

*'It was deeply disappointing that both the fire and rescue service and the county council pushed ahead with this consultation despite the warnings given them that it was gravely flawed. Sadly, our worst fears have been realised. It is clear that the proposed model simply will not work. Yet it appears that they will continue with their consultation and roadshows on the basis of something in which no-one, even apparently themselves, has any confidence.'*

*'There would be no shame in saying 'in the light of changed circumstances we are suspending the consultation while we review the situation'. We certainly would not criticise them for that. What we will criticise them for is continuing with a discredited and bogus proposal which will damage both the welfare of the people of Warwickshire and its firefighters.'*

#### Message End

Note for Editors:

- Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service have launched proposals to alter radically the structure of the fire and rescue service in Warwickshire. If accepted these proposals will dramatically reduce the number of stations and appliances available across Warwickshire.
- In a recent radio interview ACFO Waldron indicated changes in the way aspects of the proposal will operate in the light of it becoming clear that their plans would result in the fire and rescue service being overstretched. However these changes fundamentally alter the nature of the proposal, and the figures contained within it.
- The consultation will remain open until 10 March 2024 and can be found here <https://ask.warwickshire.gov.uk/>
- Tristan is the Chief Executive of the Fire and Rescue Services Association which represents firefighters across the United Kingdom.