



Press Release – 1 February 2024

WARWICKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE FIRE STATION CLOSURE PROPOSALS

TRISTAN ASHBY – CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES ASSOCIATION REFLECTS ON WARWICKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE'S STATION CLOSURE PROPOSALS

Warwickshire people, like most others, are very sensible about their safety. They regularly service their cars, have smoke alarms, check on elderly and vulnerable relations and neighbours, and ensure that their children have their cars regularly serviced and checked. But sadly, even with precautions, things can go wrong. That is when we call on the emergency services for assistance.

People have a legitimate expectation that emergency services will be planned and operated in a way that will help them in what may be the worst day in their lives. That is why recent proposals from Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service are so shocking. In a nutshell they plan to reduce the number of fire engines available across the county from 23 during the day and 21 at night, to 12 during the day and eight at night. You might ask 'does this therefore save any money and reduce attendance times. The bare facts are that these draconian cuts will not save any money (we believe they will cost more) and will make little or no difference to attendance times, and in many cases worsen them.

The proposals if implemented will result in the following stations being closed for normal business – *Bidford, Shipston, Gaydon, Fenny Compton, Kenilworth and Polesworth*. Under the current proposals they will become so called 'surge stations' to be used four times every five years. They will become little more than garages, and certainly not remain local community assets. Bedworth, Alcester, Wellesbourne and Southam stations will be closed at night. All on-call teams will be disbanded, and their members made redundant if they do not accept new, and yet unseen, contracts.

What is driving this? Well, the service intends to make all their on-call firefighters redundant as they argue that these women and men who are based in their community are unreliable and cannot guarantee a full service. Yet many on-call stations are very busy – much busier than Warwickshire's data shows - and while they are sometimes only at full capacity at night, recent events have shown this is very often when they are needed. It certainly makes no sense employing part-time firefighters to replace existing staff for four hours a day and then leave the station empty for ten hours. This is not least as several on-call stations have been asked to concentrate on ensuring they have night-time cover as there are enough wholetime pumps available during the day yet are now penalised for this. In fact, recent figures show on-call availability to be increasing, and there are now more on-call firefighters in the training pipeline.

Warwickshire say that this pattern of 'unreliability' is repeated across the country. Yet this is simply not the case. Nottinghamshire has for example 88 per cent availability in its on-call stations. Other services are recording similar successes through being flexible, imaginative, and innovative. Warwickshire has been proved to be none of these things; in fact, it has now frozen all on-call recruitment, even though there were candidates 'waiting in the wings'.

Recent events since the consultation was launched have shown how ill-judged the proposals are. A night fire at the Hospital of St Cross in Rugby tied up five fire engines. If the proposals were to go ahead this one incident would have left just three engines available to cover the whole of Warwickshire and that includes the one fire engine that covers the whole of south Warwickshire. The recent flooding had the fire and rescue service received 82 calls for emergency assistance in 24 hours. On 27th January five crews were called to a fire alarm in a high rise building in Leamington, along with a turntable ladder. This would have left just two crews available for the whole of Warwickshire. The plain facts show how reckless the proposed changes are. Even the fire and rescue service now seem to be recognising this, indicating in a recent interview that 'surge stations' might be used more often than in the proposals they are consulting on. This will undoubtedly increase costs and absorb additional resources which the county council claims it does not have.

If you do not agree with these proposals, then you need to let the fire and rescue service and your local councillors know. Reply to the consultation. Your lives, and those of your family, might depend on it.'

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.
- 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.