

9 June 2010

Organisational and resource implications of the incident at Shirley Towers, Southampton

Report by the Chief Officer

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1 Summary

1.1 The tragic incident on 6 April 2010 at Shirley Towers, in which two of our firefighters died, has had a profound impact on the Service. Everyone who works for us, in every part of the organisation, will have been affected in some way – and certainly emotionally. For many the incident has also significantly impacted on their workloads. We are therefore immensely proud of the way our staff have pulled together to ensure that we continue to deliver a very high quality of service to the public. Inevitably, there will be cost implications and this report provides an initial assessment of where these will occur.

2 Recommendation

2.1 That the current and potential organisational and resource implications arising from the ‘Shirley Towers’ incident on 6 April 2010, summarised in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.4 of this report, be noted.

3 Background and investigations

3.1 At 20:14 hours on 6 April 2010 we were called to a fire at Shirley Towers, Church Street, Southampton. The fire started on an upper floor of the 15 storey block of flats. A total of 20 fire appliances and supporting vehicles were mobilised from stations across the county. All residents living in the block of flats affected by the fire were successfully rescued or evacuated by the firefighters at the scene. During the fire fighting operations, in an extremely challenging incident, two of our firefighters died. They were firefighter James Shears, aged 35 and firefighter Alan Bannon, aged 38. Two other firefighters sustained minor burns to their hands and were taken to hospital.

3.2 Hampshire Constabulary immediately launched an investigation into the incident and this is still in progress. Arrangements were made for a team from London Fire Brigade to assist the police with the investigation into the cause of the fire. A separate team from West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service was engaged to assist with the investigation into the deaths of the two firefighters.

3.3 A multi-agency 'gold' coordinating group was also immediately established with representatives from:

- Hampshire Constabulary
- Health and Safety Executive
- Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser's Unit (Communities and Local Government)
- Southampton City Council
- Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service

The aim of this group is: *"To ensure that all relevant agencies and departments are provided with pertinent information on the police investigation, to allow the agencies to comply with their legislative obligations. [This is subject to the disclosure criteria necessary to maintain the integrity and independence of the Police investigation]"*. An important role for the group is to consider any emerging issues or concerns from the investigation so that action can swiftly be taken to mitigate the risk of repeat or similar occurrences.

3.4 We have established our own (internal) investigation team. This has been formed with staff specially selected and seconded from different departments of the Service. They are currently providing valuable support to the police investigation team by arranging for witnesses to be produced and supported. Our team is also working with our insurers and their investigating team. Once the police investigation has been concluded, our team will continue with its investigation into the incident. To date, there has been only limited backfilling of vacancies in forming this team, but this will be kept under review.

3.5 It is anticipated that the Health and Safety Executive will also carry out an investigation. Again, this is likely to take place when the police investigation is concluded. At the outset, memoranda of understanding between the various agencies have been put in place with the aims of:

- sharing information so far as is practically possible;
- reducing the impact and stress on witnesses; and
- avoiding duplication of effort.

This includes the Fire Brigades Union who intend to carry out its own investigation.

4 Resource implications

Although it is too early to give firm estimates of the financial implications of the organisational and resource implications arising from the incident, it is appropriate to alert members to the areas where costs will, or are likely to, arise. These are summarised below. Not included, are the potential costs that might arise from the findings of the various investigations. These may not emerge for some time.

4.1 Human resources:

- Secondments of staff to form our own investigation team [including temporary

- promotions]
- Overtime and additional travel for our staff involved in additional work and duties
- Cost of engaging the services of London Fire Brigade to assist police in fire investigation [pay and expenses]
- Cost of engaging the services of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service to assist police in the investigation of the deaths of the firefighters [pay and expenses] – expenditure to date about £40,000
- Additional legal costs – increased use of current service level agreement with HCC; and the potential appointment of independent specialist legal advice

4.2 Physical resources:

- Relatively minor additional costs in rearranging office accommodation, providing office equipment and office consumables for investigation team

4.3 Information and communications technology resources:

- Relatively minor additional costs in setting-up additional ICT workstations/telephony for accident investigation team

4.4 Financial implications:

- Insurance excesses
- Any uninsured liabilities – none have been identified so far
- Potential increase in insurance premiums from 2011/12
- The cost of payments [under the Firefighters' Pension Scheme] to the families of the two firefighters who died. This will be offset by the Authority's personal accident insurance cover under which £295,000 has already been received.

5 Supporting our corporate aims and objectives

- 5.1 We pride ourselves on being a learning organisation. Any lessons we learn from dealing with the aftermath of this tragic incident will be carefully assessed to see whether there are actions we can take – however minor they might appear – to improve the way we operate and deliver our services; both for the benefit of the public and our staff.

6 Risk analysis

- 6.1 Dealing with this incident has tested our business continuity and resilience plans. The Service has dealt with the additional pressures remarkably well. From the point of dealing with the incident itself [when the Major Incident Room was quickly and effectively established], to the setting-up a multi-agency 'gold' group which established sound working arrangements and information-sharing protocols for the various bodies involved in the accident investigations.
- 6.2 Any risks or concerns that emerge from the accident investigations are carefully considered to determine whether any immediate information and advice should be issued (nationwide where appropriate) to help prevent or mitigate the same risks or

hazards occurring in similar situations in the future. We are working closely with the Health and Safety Executive and the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisory Unit (in the department for Communities and Local Government) in this work.

- 6.3 There is a risk that the financial implications of conducting the investigations will result in a call on the Authority's general reserves. The amount will largely depend on the duration and outcomes of the various investigations. The Authority will need to bear in mind when setting its budget for 2011/12 that general reserves may need topping-up and that this will add further pressure to the already bleak financial context we will be operating in over the next few years.

7 People Impact Assessment

- 7.1 There are no specific concerns arising from the issues raised in the report or its recommendation. They are considered to be compatible with the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Human Rights Act 1998, and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

8 Environmental and sustainability impact assessment

- 8.1 It is too early to assess where there are any special or specific environmental concerns arising from the incident itself; but it is unlikely that these will be much different from those experienced at typical domestic dwelling fires.

9 Background papers

- 9.1 The following documents disclose the facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and has been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of the report:

None identified

Note: This excludes: (1) published works; and (2) documents that disclose exempt or confidential information defined in the Act.