

**AGENDA FOR A MEETING OF THE EMERGENCY SERVICES SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO BE
HELD AT CIVIL DEFENCE HEADQUARTERS, 7 ELCOAT AVENUE, HENDERSON,
WAITAKERE, ON TUESDAY, 3 OCTOBER 2006
COMMENCING AT 9.30 AM.**

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1 APOLOGIES



2 URGENT BUSINESS

Section 46A(7) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 provides that where an item of business is not on the agenda, it may only be dealt with at the meeting if:

- (i) the Committee by resolution so decides; and
- (ii) the Chairman has explained at the beginning of the meeting (when open to the public) that the item will be raised for discussion and decision, why the item is not on the agenda, and why it cannot be delayed until a subsequent meeting.

The Committee may make a decision on a matter determined to be urgent.

NOTE: Urgent Business need not be dealt with now and may be delayed until later in the meeting.



3 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Meeting Minutes - Tuesday, 8 August 2006

RECOMMENDATION

That the minutes of the Meeting of the Emergency Services Special Committee held on Tuesday, 8 August 2006, as circulated, be taken as read and now be confirmed.



4 **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - VISIT TO NEW YORK BY COUNCILLOR DEREK BATTERSBY AS PART OF THE REGIONAL CIVIL DEFENCE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT GROUP STUDY TOUR**

INTRODUCTION

I was lucky to have the opportunity to join a Civil Defence Emergency Management Group (CDEMG) study visit to the United States in July. The study group consisted of Councillors Neil Morrison (Manukau City and Chairman of the Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups), Wyn Hoadley (Auckland Regional Council), Ivan Dunn (North Shore City Council) and myself, accompanied by Jane Olsen (Auckland Regional Council) and Bill Morley (Waitakere City Council). The visit took in locations in New York, New Orleans and San Francisco.

Since 9/11 the words emergency management have taken on new meaning, particularly in the United States. Rather than meaning natural disasters, the words now relate to emergencies arising from all hazards. Terrorist attacks are front of mind in the United States, and happen around the world on an almost daily basis.

Just one day in New York made me patently aware that America is on high alert, 24/7 as they say. Police worked in threes many of them just street blocks apart. Private security guards were present in all public places in numbers not seen in this country. Government offices looked like prisons under armed guard. Coming from a country distant from the many conflicts facing the world today, these heightened levels of security were to me frightening, unnatural and unnerving. Whilst New Yorkers accept this as part of their daily life and feel safe, to me it's an unnatural environment to live and play in.

The scale of emergency management in the United States is vast. On any given day a number of natural disasters occur, and usually there is a loss of life. In line with this, federal and local government funding of emergency management is of a scale not seen in New Zealand. However, you get what you pay for, and we need to look at whether we are doing enough in terms of funding in the Auckland region. The forthcoming Capability and Capacity Assessment report of emergency response preparedness in Auckland will provide a useful basis for doing this.

A1-A18

As part of this report a number of items of interest are attached at pages A1 to A18. An extract of the report from Manager: Emergency Management, Bill Morley to the meeting of the Emergency Services Special Committee and a copy of a household guide to emergency management published by the New York City Office of Emergency Management. Something like this would be of enormous use in Auckland/New Zealand, and would go further than our existing Emergency Plan brochure.

I have not commented here on all aspects of the trip. Instead, I have commented on issues that I think elected members need to grapple with. Issues of a more detailed and technical nature will be picked up by officers in their reporting and system reviews.

NEW YORK CITY OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

The Emergency Operating Centre of the New York City Office of Emergency Management operates 24/7. The centre is staffed by volunteers from all relevant city and government agencies - Police, Military, Prison Service, Fire and Rescue. The centre is equipped with state of the art technology and communication systems, and monitors hazards and emergencies in real time including:

- Aircraft movements from all airports in the State of New York;
- All utilities via closed circuit television;
- Weather data from around the world by satellite;
- Movement of hazardous waste all around the world.

The centre is equipped with:

- Direct phone link to the State Governor;
- Direct phone link to the White House;
- Direct phone link to the Commander National Guards;
- Direct Phone link to all Emergency Operating Centres within the USA;
- World Satellite uplink;
- VHF uplink to all of the USA.

The Centre is currently temporarily located in a modified 2 story warehouse as it was destroyed in 9/11. However, they are due to move to a new, purpose built \$38 million (US) facility in the near future.

While on a much grander scale than New Zealand or Auckland could afford, there were some lessons to be learnt from the centre. The integration with emergency services across levels of government, and the specialised regional facility are lessons Auckland could learn from. The 24/7 staffing is also perhaps something that would be worthwhile exploring here.

MEETING WITH FEMA (FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY)

We also had the opportunity to meet with Federal Emergency Management Agency in their New York based regional office.

During and after Hurricane Katrina, Federal Emergency Management Agency was heavily criticized for a slow response, particularly in getting emergency supplies out into the community. Whilst it's not practical for me to comment on all of these issues, valuable lessons can be learned. One major issue for Federal Emergency Management Agency was the inability to get bottled drinking water to those in need. Having learnt from that, Federal Emergency Management Agency has now negotiated contractual arrangements with bottling companies (breweries, soft drink companies) to switch production within hours to bottled water, and to supply to drop zones. This approach is being instigated throughout America so that all key manufacturers will be able to react within hours to a serious event and supply emergency supplies.

We also learnt that the Department of Homeland Security, of which Federal Emergency Management Agency is a part, is moving toward introducing an alert system using a 'ping' to all cell phones, TV, internet sites and satellite radio. This will be used for all emergency events including war, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and all hazards to public safety, and is designed to reach as many people as possible before a catastrophic event. It has obvious similarities to the Cell Broadcasting proposal that the Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups is proposing to the Ministry of Civil Defence Emergency Management (MCDEM).

ACTIONS FOR AUCKLAND AND WAITAKERE

It is clear to me from the trip that the region needs its own Group Emergency Operating Centre, and that the inadequate sharing arrangement with Auckland City needs to be abandoned as soon as possible. Ideally, the Emergency Operating Centre would be fully integrated with emergency services and staffed 24/7. However these improvements may take time, and we need to get on with the construction of a centre in the near future. Funding will be an issue, but it is one that the Councils of the region (and possibly the government) need to tackle. I look forward to the Group Controllers report to the Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups on this issue.

We need to continue to push Ministry of Civil Defence Emergency Management to introduce the cell broadcasting initiative as part of a broader national warning framework and system. We can introduce local systems (such as sirens) to augment the national level initiatives.

I also think that the idea of contractual arrangements with suppliers, both in New Zealand and around the Pacific Rim, is a good way to provide for the supply of emergency rations and equipment. I will be pushing for this through the Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups and with Ministry of Civil Defence Emergency Management.

NOTE

This report went to the Council meeting on 30 August 2006 where it was resolved:

- “1. That the visit to New York by Councillor Derek Battersby as part of the Regional Civil Defence Emergency Management Group study tour report be received.
2. That the Waitakere City Council supports in principle the establishment of a dedicated Group Emergency Operations Centre for the Auckland region, and that if necessary a report come back to the Emergency Services Special Committee at the appropriate time to formalise this support.
3. That Councillor Battersby, in his role as Council representative on the Civil Defence Emergency Management Group, be supported to explore and push for emergency supply contracts for goods and equipment in an emergency.”

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In respect to resolution 2, a report by the Group Controller, Harry O'Rourke was received at the September 2006 meeting of the Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups which outlined future options for a Group Emergency Operations Centre (GEOC) in the Auckland region where it was resolved that a dedicated and appropriately resourced Group Emergency Operations Centre be pursued for the Auckland region as a matter of urgency. The Auckland Regional Council is investigating options for suitable premises for this purpose from within buildings they currently own.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Chairman's Report – Visit to New York by Councillor Derek Battersby as part of the Regional Civil Defence Emergency Management Group Study Tour be received.

Councillor DQ Battersby, JP

CHAIRMAN

EMERGENCY SERVICES SPECIAL COMMITTEE



5 OVERVIEW OF CIVIL DEFENCE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to give the Emergency Services Special Committee an overview of Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) since the last report, and to outline future planned activity.

BACKGROUND

The Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002 introduced a new framework for Civil Defence Emergency Management in New Zealand. The legislation has established a regional basis for the leadership of emergency management with the establishment of Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups (CDEMG's), and Co-ordinating Executive Groups (CEG's) to support them. Alongside this regional framework there is still a strong responsibility for local emergency management that lies with district/city councils. The basis for this management is summarised within the "4R's" of emergency management namely Reduction, Readiness, Response and Recovery.

Reduction - Identifying and analysing long terms risks to human life and property from natural or man made hazards: taking steps to eliminate these risks where practicable, and where not, reducing the likelihood and the magnitude of their impact.

Readiness - Developing operational systems and capabilities before an emergency happens. These include self help and response programmes for the general public, as well as specific programmes for emergency services, utilities and other agencies.

Response – Actions taken immediately before, during or directly after an emergency, to save lives and property, as well as help communities to recover.

Recovery – Activities beginning after initial impact has been stabilised and extending until the community's capacity for self help has been restored.

Rural Fire is an integral element of the City's Civil Defence Emergency Management response organisation, although generally involved on a daily basis in dealing with fire events. In this regard they work in the same way as the volunteer forces of the New Zealand Fire Service but under the auspices of the Waitakere Rural Fire Authority. In an emergency Rural Fire Forces become an element of the overall Civil Defence Emergency Management response

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Civil Defence Emergency Management is a responsibility of Council under the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002. Civil Defence Emergency Management forms part of Council's strategic framework in that it contributes to community well being and building strong communities by increasing community readiness for and resilience to emergency events, reducing exposure to such events, and providing for emergency response in the case of such events. The requirement for local planning and co-ordination is essential to meeting these requirements. Rural Fire contributes to the Green Network through protection of rural forest areas and strong communities through its volunteer programme, supporting communities to meet their own emergency needs.

ISSUES

1. New Emergency Operating Centre

Significant progress has been made since the last report. The resource consent has been granted and the building consent lodged but not yet approved. Tender applications close on Tuesday, 3 October 2006 with a recommendation on the preferred contractor scheduled to go to the Tenders Subcommittee on Friday, 20 October 2006.

A time line work programme had also been developed for internal move purposes with a view to total vacation of the existing premises on Friday, 27 October 2006. Temporary accommodation for the emergency management staff will be alongside records management at the GPT building in Waipareira Avenue which has sufficient space for normal day to day office requirements. Excess equipment will be either stored in space that has been provided by the Police at the Henderson Police Station or in a rented mini storage garage in Constellation Drive. The Volunteer Rescue Team will also be able to continue their training and activities from the Henderson Police Station.

For interim purposes, the Waitemata Room, together with other rooms on Level 2 of the Civic Building, has been selected to be the alternate emergency operating centre should there be an activation requirement during the building period. A Standard Operating Procedure has been developed for activation, setting up and operating purposes. It is intended that all Emergency Operating Centre (EOC) staff will have been briefed and will have been walked through the set up arrangements before the existing premises close.

At the time of writing this report, a programme for further update meetings with neighbours in regard to the development was under discussion.

2. **Warning Sirens Project and other Warning System Options**

Since the last meeting, a working group has been established comprising Emergency Management staff from Waitakere City, North Shore City and the Rodney District. The purpose of this grouping is to develop a common approach for the North West Emergency Management Zone for the introduction of a layered public warning/alerting system within the zone. This could include sirens, mass telephone and cell phone text messaging, and ripple control sirens in houses. This will also be accompanied with the development of public education programmes including evacuation and traffic management plans.

As a first step it has been agreed to produce detailed Geographical Information System maps for each district which identify the number of coastal properties at risk from tsunami within specific contour levels. This element of planning will be helpful in other ways as it will also better identify other at risk locations such as schools and rest homes within contour levels. North Shore City has already undertaken this project and the Waitakere and Rodney model will be based on what they have done.

Meetings have also been held with a representative from Federal Sirens who are the largest producers of siren systems in the world. Their representative is undertaking to import a siren in the near future for testing purposes. How the siren will be tested have yet to be worked through but initial idea is to conduct tests in remote areas of the Rodney District where there are limited numbers of people.

The Western Bay of Plenty, Manawatu and Taupo Districts have both recently signed up with a New Zealand based sms/text messaging company (Optn) for providing emergency warning/alerting messages to the public. It is the company's aim to become the nationally accepted service for all Civil Defence txt alert. The basis of the system is that messages will be sent to people who actually register to receive messages rather than the incorporation of mass messaging. Cost to council is a \$50 connection fee and \$20 per month licence fee. The registration fee for this free service for community subscribers is only 50 cents. The North West Zone Working Group is keen to further explore implementation of this alerting system as a tangible first step for providing a simple and effective alerting system for warning messages for the community to join into. The regionally preferred cell broadcasting approach will also be pursued.

Of other interest is the potential for ripple control warning systems to be fitted into households. This system works on the same principle as ripple control on hot water systems in houses whereby an electrical signal can be sent to switch water on or off during peak usage periods. In this instance the signal would activate an alarm as fitted into a normal three pin socket within households or businesses. While this system shows some promise, unfortunately most hot water systems within the majority of the Northwest Zone do not currently work on ripple control. This is not the case for Auckland City, Manukau City and the Franklin and Papakura districts. Discussion with the line company Vector Electricity indicates that it is their intention to introduce ripple control within the North West Zone Districts in the future but not for a few years yet. Further investigation would suggest that the introduction of a ripple control system would not be an overly expensive exercise, although there may be costs to householders.

In addition to the above, the Manager Emergency Management presented a report to the Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups at its September meeting outlining the Waitakere City decision to pursue the introduction of a siren warning system within the coastal fringes and that the North Shore City and Rodney Districts had also joined in the project. It was emphasised that Waitakere City would prefer a Civil Defence Emergency Management Group approach to the project and an invitation was made for other councils in the region to join the project. The Civil Defence Emergency Management response was not overly enthusiastic, and only the Franklin District has made a positive response to this request.

The key issue for going ahead with a siren system in part of the region is to get regional standards and protocols agreed. This will form a key part of the Waitakere, North Shore and Rodney project.

3. **Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups Capability and Capacity Assessment Report**

Over the last six months, an assessment of the Capability and Capacity of the Auckland Region Civil Defence Emergency Management Group to respond to a major disaster impacting the region has been undertaken by Kestrel Group Limited (circulated separately to Committee Members). The assessment included surveys, interviews, workshops and professional review and was formerly presented to the Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups at its meeting in September. The assessment highlighted a number of emerging themes as follows:

- There needs to be greater emphasis by individual organisations on integrating their Civil Defence Emergency Management, Business Continuity Plan and Crisis Management arrangements in order to ensure an integrated response capability.
- There needs to be a greater understanding across all organisations of the impact a major emergency will have on the Auckland Region and consequently what resources will be required to respond to and recover from such an event.
- While increased efforts have been made to develop regional guidelines for the way training, information and processes are managed across the Group, more work is required in this area to ensure consistent and integrated planning and response.
- While some work has begun in developing staff capability and capacity for the Group Emergency Operations Centre (GEOC), the functions of the Group Emergency Operations Centre need revisiting in order to determine its best for, location and resourcing, to ensure an effective regional response to a major emergency.
- The Civil Defence Emergency Management Group organisational structure is not providing enough strategic direction for the Civil Defence Emergency Management sector in the Auckland region. The Group Emergency Management Office needs increased delivery capability to reduce reliance on goodwill from Civil Defence Emergency Management Group partner organisations. Alongside this, Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups and particularly Co-ordinating Executive Group need to be examined to ensure they are operating at a strategic, direction-setting level rather than focussing on detailed operational issues.
- While Civil Defence Emergency Management is increasingly providing strong direction to the Civil Defence Emergency Management sector, national guidance in some key areas is still required. In particular, there needs to be better engagement by some central government agencies with the Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups Group to ensure more effective Civil Defence Emergency Management planning and process.

Kestrel Group Limited also provided a set of recommendations and actions to address each of the above themes. Some of these recommendations are already being addressed by projects currently underway. Some recommendations, if implemented, will require new projects to be established and some adjustments made to the current work programme. Significant additional resources are likely to be required at the group/regional level. The current approach of in-kind support for local authorities is not sustainable, with workload falling heavily on some Councils and officers (particularly at Waitakere).

To further the work required in the assessment the Coordinating Executive Group (CEG) has established a working group led by Harry O'Rourke as Group Controller to examine the report, recommendations and actions in detail and report back to Coordinating Executive Group Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups with a proposed programme and actions for addressing the issues highlighted.

The assessment has been a major undertaking and the first of its kind in the country. Although primarily aimed at the Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups ability to prepare and respond to major emergency, final outcomes will have relevance locally in terms of standardisation across the region.

4. Local Emergency Management Activity

In addition to normal day to day work activities, considerable staff time and activity is being given to the new Emergency Operating Centre and siren system projects. Support to Civil Defence Emergency Management Group work activity remains considerable particularly with the planning now required for two forthcoming Group exercises to be conducted in November

Specific local activity over the reporting period includes:

- A welfare centre training day for welfare and rescue volunteers;
- The upgrade of radio capability and installation at Piha, Huia, Glen Eden and Henderson Library;
- A two day rescue training qualification weekend for rescue volunteers;
- Upgrade of hand held radios for response purposes;
- Specialist training for rural fire volunteers;
- Planning for a forthcoming rescue competition involving seven teams from the upper half of the North Island;
- Ongoing talks and presentations to community groups and schools;
- Participation in the recent volunteer day parade.

5. Change to Fire legislation

Following from the withdrawal, or non-presentation of the first proposed draft of the legislation, no further information has been forthcoming from the Department of Internal Affairs about the status or progress of this review. A workshop was held attended by senior representatives of the stakeholder organisation, but no information regarding the workshop has been received. From a Mayoral Meeting held on the 12 September 2006, Local Government New Zealand have requested that all local bodies carry out an in-depth consultation with all interested parties in order to consolidate a firm submission to Government.

6. Operations and Training

No major vegetation fires were attended over the winter season. Rural crews attended a number of structure and non-fire incidents throughout the district and performed well.

On-going co-operation and operational integration with the New Zealand Fire Service continues at a high level, this has been helped by the enhanced operational capability of our crews.

On-station maintenance training has been ongoing throughout the winter period with a concentration on basic skills training. A number of specialist courses have also been conducted during the period and a chainsaw course is also planned to take place in October. The second of the series of three courses for the qualification for Rural Fire Officer was held on the 30 September 2006.

RESOURCES

The emergency management sections remain well resourced for normal activity requirements and there are no specific operational issues.

The emergency management section has taken delivery of a replacement 4 x 4 duty vehicle which has been suitably marked with Civil Defence and Council logos plus stripe markings. It is intended to outfit the vehicle with red light flashing capability in accordance with new legislation which recognises Civil Defence Emergency Management vehicles as emergency service vehicles.

CONCLUSION

Emergency Management staff and activity continues at a high pace both locally and regionally. The new Emergency Operating Centre and warning systems projects are progressing and involve a considerable amount of ongoing planning and organisation. There is a strong emphasis on ensuring a smooth move from the existing building to new premises before the building phase of the new Emergency Operating Centre commences and ensuring that there are robust arrangements in place for alternative Emergency Operating Centre operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Overview of Civil Defence Emergency Management Activity report be received.
2. That Emergency Management staff be authorised to actively pursue the introduction of voluntary community subscription to the Optn text messaging alerting system, in conjunction with North Shore City Council and Rodney District Council if possible, and that a report be brought back to the Emergency Services Special Committee in relation to this issue.

Report prepared by: Bill Morley, Manager: Emergency Management.



6 RURAL FIRE-FIGHTER FITNESS PROGRAMME

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform the Emergency Services Special Committee about a proposal by the National Rural Fire Authority (NRFA) to introduce a Rural Fire-Fighter Fitness Programme.

BACKGROUND

Under Rural Fire Legislation, Waitakere City Council is the Waitakere Rural Fire Authority for the rural area of this City and has responsibilities which include:

- a. Fire preparedness, fire prevention, fire suppression and the necessary training and equipping of the volunteer Rural Fire Forces in order that they can carry out these roles.
- b. Producing a Local Rural Fire Plan.
- c. Authorising and monitoring open, restricted, and prohibited fire seasons for the Waitakere Rural Fire District.
- d. Meeting the requirements of the legislation for Council's Rural Fire risk factor.

By contractual arrangements, and through the services of the Principal Rural Fire Officer, the Waitakere Rural Fire Authority provides rural fire services to North Shore City Council. Oversight of all services rests with the Manager: Emergency Management, within the Corporate and Civic Services directorate.

An issue has arisen whereby the National Rural Fire Authority have proposed to introduce without consultation across sector, a Fire-Fighter Fitness Programme.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Waitakere City Council is deemed to be the Waitakere Rural Fire Authority pursuant to section 7(2) of the Forest and Rural Fires Act 1977. Rural Fire contributes towards Council's strategic framework in that it contributes to community well being by enhancing community preparedness for the risk of wildfire by educating communities in fire safety, managing the fire risk, and responding to and suppressing any fires which may occur. Rural Fire also contributes to the Green Network through providing protection of the Waitakere Ranges from fire hazards. Rural Fire resources are also available to provide assistance to communities in other emergency events.

ISSUES

The National Rural Fire Authority has introduced a Rural Fire Health and Fitness Programme for rural fire-fighters. It is a follow on from the programme implemented by the Dept of Conservation for their paid staff, and is the standard required for fire crews deployed to assist in overseas operations. The programme is designed to assess and verify the fitness levels of operational rural fire-fighters, and sets varying standards for fire-ground roles.

The programme purports to provide compliance for Rural Fire Authorities with the requirements of Health and Safety legislation as the "employer" of rural volunteers. The programme is stated to be optional but its introduction is likely to create an industry "best practice" standard, a fact which would be quickly identified, and utilised, by OSH should any harm befall our staff.

In the proposed programme, three levels of fitness are identified which must be met bi-annually for those under 50 years and annually for those over 50.

High level:	Full operational duties for frontline staff. Walk 4.8 km Carrying 20.5 kg In 45 min
Moderate level:	For Command and operational support staff. Walk 3.2 km Carrying 11.3 kg In 30 min
Low level:	For non-operational support staff. Walk 1.6 km Carrying nil In 16 min

The requirements of the three levels contain no variations for gender, physical size or age, in fact with age, the requirement is actually increased. It is simply a requirement to carry a certain weight over a defined distance in a set time. The information booklet describing the programme makes reference to the support to be provided by the Rural Fire Authority. This presumably refers to the provision of time and equipment to allow staff to train to reach and maintain the standard, as per the Fire Service fitness programmes for their paid staff. This level of support would be difficult and expensive for Council to provide for their volunteer fire-fighting crews.

It should be noted that an attempt by Fire Service to introduce a similar fitness programme for their volunteer staff in mid 2005 was roundly rejected by the United Fire Brigades Association the volunteer's representative body, to which the Waitakere City rural fire volunteers belong.

The current medical fitness procedure is an open letter to the member's doctor which outlines the duties and activities expected of them and requires the doctor to confirm that the member is medically able to safely carry out these activities without harm. The content of the letter has been approved by the Fire Service's own doctor and follows the same format as that used by Fire Service volunteers.

It should be noted that in Waitakere City's Fire Forces, not one operational injury has been able to be attributed to lack of fitness on the part of fire-fighters.

Under the proposed programme, those staff members who wish to take part are required by Health and Safety legislation to sign a consent form before entering the programme. Staff will then be required to undergo a physical examination by a medical practitioner, who would sign off a clearance on their fitness to under-go the relevant pack test or not.. As a requirement of the programme, Council could be expected to cover the cost of both the initial and on-going medical examinations.

The proposed programme states that the fitness test is a purely voluntary commitment, but also states that any staff member choosing not to consent would be relegated to a non-operational support role until such time as a successful fitness test has been accomplished. For those who are fully operational and intend to remain in that role, and who may be fit enough to continue, this somewhat limits their options regarding freedom of choice.

Considerable upper body strength as well as a set of strong legs is required to complete the pack test, although staff are reasonably fit, few would meet the standard without assistance. A defined and "professional" training programme would be required for each individual staff member to safely bring them to a fitness level which will enable them to undergo the test. This would need to continue particularly for those over 50 years, to ensure that their fitness is maintained.

The only feasible path to achieve this level of fitness without harming staff would be to provide them with an individualised programme to provide the means of safely gaining the fitness required, which would rely on their commitment, encroach on family time and have potential financial implication for Council to supporting the fitness programmes.

The following options are open to Council:

1. To reject the programme completely;
2. To offer the programme to volunteer staff, as a truly voluntary option;
3. To accept the programme as policy;
4. To make formal representation to the National Rural Fire Authority questioning both the necessity and suitability of the programme for day to day response requirements for rural fire forces.

Option 1

To reject the programme may at some time in the future involve Council in some negative dealings with Health and Safety who would presumably equate the programme as “industry best practice”. Should harm befall any of our staff the fact that we had not introduced and followed the programme as recommended may affect the Council’s standing as a good employer, especially as it involves volunteer fire-fighters and result in bad publicity.

Option 2

On the surface to would seem that offering the programme to those staff who wish to accept it is a credible and reasonable option. It would however, over time, become the source of major problems and disruption to crews. Council as the Fire Authority could not properly manage operationally with a dual level of fitness throughout its staff and this option is not considered feasible.

Option 3

For Council to accept the programme as “industry best practice” and seek to implement the programme fully to all staff, both those currently serving and future recruits, would prove to be very expensive; both in monetary terms, but more importantly, in the potential increased loss of staff, the majority of which would be our most committed and experienced members. This option would also add to the difficulties of recruitment.

Option 4

To make a formal representation to the National Rural Fire Authority questioning the need and suitability of the programme as proposed to allow time to further investigate the need for volunteer staff to undertake it. Council would want to have discussions with the United Fire Brigades Association to ascertain the basis for their rejection of the programme. Discussions with the National Rural Fire Authority would also need to take place.

It is the recommendation of this report, that the Emergency Services Special Committee accepts option 4 above and that the National Rural Fire Authority is informed accordingly outlining the reasons for this decision.

RESOURCES

Significant additional volunteer time would be required to meet levels likely to be required in the proposal. It is considered that the proposal is likely to deter volunteers from Rural Fire Force activities. Additional financial resource is also likely to be required from Council.

CONCLUSION

It is recommended that Council questions and possibly rejects the fitness testing proposal by the National Rural Fire Authority as currently proposed and as outlined above, and the Committee is asked to authorise this approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Rural Fire-Fighter Fitness Programme report be received.
2. That the Emergency Services Special Committee authorise the Chief Executive Officer to question the need for the proposal by the National Rural Fire Authority for the introduction of fitness testing for Rural Fire Forces as proposed and reject the proposal if considered necessary.

Report prepared by: Peter Barber, Principal Rural Fire Officer.

