



**REPORT TITLE: GFRS Future Training Provision Update**

<b>Scrutiny meeting</b>	Friday 17 November 2023
<b>Chair</b>	Cllr Jeremy Hilton
<b>Presenting Officer</b>	CFO Preece
<b>Item Type</b>	Overview
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	Update from the Property Board Meeting and provision plans for future in-house GFRS training.
<b>Recommendations/ Action sought</b>	
<b>Forthcoming Decisions</b>	n/a
<b>Background Documents</b>	
<b>Appendices</b>	
<b>Contact Information</b>	

## **1. Introduction**

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service's (GFRS) training centre contract is due to end in March 2028. The future training facility provision needs to be agreed and developed to ensure the workforce continues to be highly trained.

GFRS and Property Delivery, Asset Management and Property Services jointly presented a paper to the Property Board on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

The paper set out recommendations for GFRS's training facility arrangements beyond March 2028.

The paper included several recommendations which included:

1. taking no action
2. renewing the existing arrangements once Avon FRS take over the 25-year-old Severn Park Training Centre
3. outsourcing all training to another provider
4. creating five strategic sites at existing fire stations and a new-build training facility within Gloucestershire (preferred option).

## **2. Background Provided to Property board**

Under the Fires Services Act 2004, Fire and Rescue Services are legislated to make provisions for a range of emergency situations that they may attend. Included in these provisions is the delivery of suitable training to enable an effective management of the emergency. Within Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service, the main delivery of our training is undertaken at a Joint Training Centre (JTC) in Avonmouth, Bristol.

In April 2003, the JTC, known as 'Severn Park' opened to provide a collaborative training solution for GFRS, Avon FRS and Somerset (now Devon and Somerset) FRS.

The training centre was financed via a Private Finance Initiative (PFI), which is currently administered by Babcock International. The operational service agreement runs for a 25 year term. It was signed on the 1st April 2003, and terminates on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2028. This means that GFRS need to secure future arrangements for training its operational firefighters and commanders' post April 2028.

The training centre was initially established to cater solely for initial basic firefighter training. However, following a ten year recruitment freeze during austerity, the use of the centre (by GFRS) evolved considerably since its original inception. The JTC now caters for a mix of initial basic training, maintenance of skills training (MOST) and leadership development training. Following the re-introduction of recruitment (and subsequent initial basic training), capacity at JTC is far out stripped and GFRS have been exploring other options, such as the Fire Service College for the last five years in order to fulfil our statutory training obligations. As stated the centre is located out of County and this has been a big hindrance on GFRS logistically. Due to the blended approach of employment with a large number of Firefighters (FF) being On-call (Part-time) getting them to engage with training courses has been hard at times. An example of travel times for the furthest station is a round trip of 132 miles and a travel time of 2 hrs 50 on average per day.

It is acknowledged that the training needs of GFRS have changed significantly over the past 20 years, particularly when considered against the current and anticipated future workforce profile. Therefore, with the conclusion of the Severn Park contract due in April 2028, GFRS now need to consider their options for future training provisions beyond 2028.

National Operational Guidance is the sector standard for FRS to align with and the Health and Safety Executive urge Services to adapt the guidance as close to the original published guidance as possible. How critical skills are delivered and refreshed in line with new guidance is also key to how any training or qualification or requalification is delivered. His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) will continue to inspect FRSs and how training is being delivered, implemented and embedded within Services.

Avon FRS have made agreements with Bristol City Council to continue the lease of the land and utilise the site post 2028 as their main training facility. Originally, the contract stated that all three services were required to cover the costs of returning the training centre back to a brown-field site. As Avon FRS have taken on the lease, this arrangement means that GCC's liability and costs to exit the current contract is zero, which has been confirmed by legal services. This is an unknown financial saving.

### **3. Proposal**

The proposal will outline four options for how GFRS will provide the ongoing requirements of training its workforce post 2028, whilst looking to ensure the option provides the strategic intention of a training solution fit for firefighters for future years.

#### **3.1 Planning**

Any works will require full planning permission, consultation with neighbours and statutory timings of 12-18 weeks. We anticipate all planning applications will be treated as REG3.

#### **3.2 Risks**

Not having a fully functional training option for GFRS by 2028 leading to a non-compliant service which has statutory duties to uphold and maintain at all times in line with the Fire Services Act 2004. It would also lead to untrained firefighters, who would become unsafe and increase the risk of injury to themselves and members of the Gloucestershire communities.

#### **3.3 Options**

Looking at Firefighters of the future and to overcome some of the issues experienced at Severn Park, several criteria need to be considered in the proposed options are as follows:

- Travel distances to the training site/sites need to be kept minimal
- The ability to remain agile in the delivery of training, to ensure changes in National Operational Guidance can be implemented
- Firefighters are required to maintain operational competence across a range of skills which require them to train weekly, therefore accessible sites near to their own stations is beneficial

#### **Option 1 - Do nothing**

The option to do nothing, does not exist. GFRS are required to train its workforce and the contract at Severn Park ends in March 2028.

### **Option 2 – Renew existing arrangements with Avon FRS**

This option would be to negotiate the use of Severn Park through Avon FRS.

Advantages:

- Consistent approach at a site known to all GFRS staff

Dis-advantages:

- This option does not resolve the travel distance issue which leads to high costs in time and fuel
- Uncertainty if Avon would be able to accommodate GFRS courses
- As the site is operational, Avon are not under the same time constraints as GFRS to deliver their training options at the centre post 2028. Therefore it is unknown if Avon would have capacity to deliver GFRS courses
- Training delivery would likely cost more once Avon take the site as no GFRS trainers would be present
- Avon would likely build their own Annual Training Plan first, so availability for courses may be inflexible.
- Avon could withdraw from the agreement (depending on contract legally), leaving GFRS with limited time an options to source training facilities.

If option 2 was selected, GFRS would have uncertainty about whether Avon could deliver the requirements GFRS have and if the contract or agreement did not work, and therefore terminated, GFRS would be left without a viable training option.

### **Option 3 - Outsource all training to another provider**

The Fire Service College is a well-known facility, providing excellent training opportunities and it is within the boundaries of Gloucestershire.

Advantages:

- World renowned training Centre
- Within the border of Gloucestershire, reducing travel time and fuel costs
- Collaboration opportunities with other Services
- Consistency as currently our Wholetime Staff attend the Fire Service College for their Firefighter Apprenticeships when they join the Service

Dis-advantages:

- The estimated cost to deliver the Annual Training Plan from Severn Park would be four times higher per annum (based on 2023/24 budget).
- In competition for course spaces with multiple FRS across the UK, Europe and the World
- As a Private provider, we would have limited agility in changing the course content due National Operational Guidance updates or specific internal learning that needs addressing
- As a mainly On-call employer, we would risk substantial course cancellation fees due to the terms and conditions of the college

- We would have no control over % increase on costs
- Although in county, the travel time is still substantial with the Forest of Dean stations being over a two hour round trip.

#### **Option 4 – Create five strategic sites and a new build training facility**

There are a total of 21 stations within the county therefore it would not be feasible to provide significant or substantial facilities for every station due to logistics and cost, therefore it would be more reasonable to provide superior facilities within an acceptable travel distance of each station.

Looking at geographical boundaries within Gloucestershire and an aspirational target of 30 minutes travel time has been used to identify the five strategic locations where training facilities can be enhanced. Two of the identified sites are existing PFI stations with training facilities, therefore expenditure at these two stations would be minimal.

In addition to these five sites, a new training centre will be built at a preferred location off Junction 10 on the M5.

Advantages:

- Revenue savings over the lifetime of the facilities will be beneficial for both the Fire Service in respect of financial as well as a competent workforce keeping pace with the changing face of Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Services moving forward
- Apart from the initial build costs, the internal Learning & Development team would be responsible for delivering all training, preventing third party costs to external providers
- Every FF within the County will be no more than 30 minutes from a Strategic training site
- Reduced travel time, fuel costs and associated environmental impact.
- Agility in changing training courses at short notice
- Minimal impact if courses are cancelled in terms of cost
- Agility in delivering any new and emerging risk immediately and not having to negotiate changes with external providers
- Staff can attend the majority of training as a crew with their peers, already proven to be of benefit from staff surveys
- Investment in stations has a positive effect on staff morale and productivity
- Annual inflation costs will only be reflected in Staff wages
- Opportunities for neighbouring services to use facilities (at a cost)
- An internally placed main training centre would provide carbonaceous hot fire (realistic fire) facilities within the County for the first time in 25 years

Dis-advantages:

- Early capital investment and implementation
- Implementation of works may have an initial impact on Stations with regard to training facilities being off line

#### **4. Training facility requirements**

To ensure the uplift in facilities meets the needs of operational Firefighters both now and in the future, the following would be required:

<b>Core Skill</b>	<b>Facilities Required</b>	<b>Strategic Training Facility or Own Station</b>
<b>Breathing Apparatus</b>	Training Building	Strategic Training Facility
	Drill Yard	
	BA Compressor	
	Cylinder Storage	
	Smoke Generator	
	Covered external area for briefing	
<b>Command and Control</b>	Lecture Room	Own Station Strategic Training Facility
<b>Hazardous Materials</b>	Lecture Room	Own Station
	Drill Yard	
<b>Medical Assistance/Trauma Care</b>	Lecture room	Own Station
<b>Pumps and Ladders</b>	Training building for ladders including ability to utilise a roof ladder	Strategic Training Facility
	Open water/trench for RTC/ Animal rescue	
<b>Road Traffic Collision</b>	Section of road with Armco	Strategic Training Facility
	Area for car storage	
<b>Safe Working at Height</b>	Training building with suitable points for SWAH internal and external	Strategic Training Facility
<b>Safe Working Near Water</b>	Lecture room, drill yard or local training venue	Own Station and station area

In addition, each strategic training facility (STF) will have adequate lighting and welfare facilities.

### Training Scenarios

Each of the STF facilities are designed to achieve the same training scenarios.

Below is a list of facilities each one will have and the general training scenarios that can be covered.

### Breathing Apparatus training

- They will have a range of windows to allow for realistic tactical ventilation exercises
- Several doors for door entry procedures
- Several compartments for different scenarios
- A simulated basement
- Adjustable internal hazards i.e. loose steps, handrails, holes in floor, hanging obstructions
- BA compressors
- Buildings will include a dry riser

### Ladders

- Training building will incorporate areas for ladder pitches

- There will be a steel structure which will be open plan with a range of window openings and types to include dormer and velux for realistic pitches
- There will be a sloping roof to enable roof ladder pitches
- Training structures will incorporate a method for getting casualties to upper floors

### Safe Working at Height

- Work restraint and fall arrest can be performed on either the steel structure for ladders or the training building to BA
- Suitable areas to suspend casualty from for simulated suspension recovery
- Where possible roofs should have solid construction to allow safe working at height scenarios to be carried out

### Road Traffic Collision

- An area designated for road traffic collision to be incorporate into each STF
- A ditch large enough to place a car
- An Armco to simulate central reservation
- An RTC compound for safe storage of cars

When assessing what facilities need to be provided by the new training centre, not only must we look at what is currently being provided at the existing site, but also plan our requirements for the future, based on professional judgement, national operational guidance, and foreseeable risk.

The following resources would be required for a new training centre post 2028.

Facilities Required	Comments
<b>Commercial building (Multi use)</b>	Gas fuelled for BA with basement area and confined space  To incorporate height for ladder pitches including roof ladder use  To incorporate ventilation routes  To incorporate SWAH L1-3 (safe working at height)
<b>H-Block Double storey (metal cabins)</b>	Carbonaceous and to use for PPV training
<b>Cylinder Storage</b>	
<b>Breathing Apparatus Compressor</b>	
<b>Smoke Generator</b>	
<b>Covered external area for briefings</b>	
<b>Breathing Apparatus set cleaning and maintenance room</b>	
<b>Lecture Room (could be shared)</b>	

<b>Incident Command Virtual Reality Capability</b>	
<b>Drill Yard</b>	
<b>Road Traffic Collision Compound</b>	To accommodate a minimum of 6 cars
<b>Section of road with Armco for RTC</b>	
<b>Open water/trench for RTC/ Animal rescue</b>	
<b>Forklift for moving RTC vehicles</b>	
<b>Appliance bay</b>	
<b>Muster bay</b>	
<b>Drying room</b>	
<b>Dirty kit room</b>	
<b>Showers/toilets</b>	
<b>Kitchen facilities/catering</b>	
<b>Lecture room</b>	
<b>Offices</b>	
<b>Locker room for permanent staff</b>	
<b>Parking</b>	

## **5. Preferred Option selected at Property Board**

The Property Board supported the preferred option - development of the creation of five strategic sites and a new build training facility.

As agreed at Property Board, GFRS will develop a detailed capital bid and business plan to be submitted in 2024/25.

A detailed work programme will be developed by GFRS and AMPS to create the capital bid and business case.

## **6. Actions since Property Board**

Work has continued with two further workshops taking place (3<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> October) between Property Services, Design, Architects and GFRS.

These meetings have discussed the Service needs, potential site locations, feasibility of co-locating the site with other GCC departments to make the most efficient use of the facilities and early design proposals.

Feasibility work continues and is currently on schedule.