**IRMP Consultation – Frequently Asked Questions**

**Why do you need to make these savings?**

As is the case with all public services, we have to work within a set budget available to us. This has shrunk considerably in recent years and we now have further cost pressures to deal with.

We have to find £1.4million a year, due to not being able to use one of our crewing models going forward, and potentially have to find up to £2.6million to put into our staff pension scheme – as the government has reduced its contribution to this nationally.

We don’t enjoy being in this position, and we understand that members of the public won’t want us to do either of these things, but to do nothing is not an option.

We have a duty to manage our budget in a sensible and measured way so that we can continue to provide a good quality service to South Yorkshire for years to come.

We’re keen to see what option people prefer – even if they’re not too keen on either.

**Is there not another way you can save the money?**

Whilst we are open to suggestions, the reality is that three quarters of our budget is spent on firefighter salaries. Given the extent of the savings we need to achieve the only realistic options involve changing the way we provide our 999 service.

In the last ten years, we have continually sought ways to reduce costs from other areas of the organisation, including:

* Cutting the number of senior managers we employ
* Reviewing and reducing all our support staff functions
* Reducing our spending on things other than staff pay
* Saving money by buying equipment in conjunction with other services

Today we are continuing to explore other opportunities for making savings elsewhere – including scrutinising every job vacancy that comes up, to ensure it’s really needed, and collaborating with other public services.

**What about your reserves? Can they be used to meet the shortfall?**

Realistically, no. Much like money in a personal savings account, once our reserves have been spent, they are spent. It wouldn’t be wise, or sustainable, to use this one-off funding to ‘prop-up’ our annual spending as this would effectively be delaying the inevitable.

Instead we are spending the bulk of our reserves on ‘one-off’ investment projects to ensure our fire stations, fire engines, equipment technology are up-to-date and fit for purpose.

**What does ‘riding four firefighters on an engine’ actually mean?**

This refers to the amount of firefighters that we normally have on a fire engine, during each shift. Currently, we aim to have **five** firefighters on each of our fire engines at any given time.

Even now, though, we have four firefighters on a fire engine for around one third of the time – due to sickness and holidays.

Riding four ‘as standard’ would mean changing our policy so that we will have **four** firefighters on each of our fire engines, at any given time.

This would help us save a significant amount of the money that we need to save – and would mean that we don’t have to reduce the number of fire engines we have. Reducing the amount of fire engines we have available 24/7, which is the alternative option, would potentially slow down our response to emergencies.

Whilst we acknowledge a reduction from five to four firefighters per engine will have an impact on our incident response, we will still commit breathing apparatus wearers into house fires with four person crews, and will always mobilise extra appliances where needed.

**Do these proposals include redundancies?**

In short, no.

Should we go ahead and change from riding five firefighters on an engine, to four, as standard, then we will have to reduce the number of firefighters we have across the service – but this won’t be done through redundancies.

We would look to use ‘natural wastage’ – which involves not replacing firefighters as they retire until we’ve saved the amount of money we need to save.

**We’ve seen that this change, if introduced, would involve losing around 85 firefighter posts – is this true?**

We don’t know. Clearly, if we have to save the full £4 million, then this would roughly be the number of firefighter roles we’d have to cut.

Right now, though, we’re not fully sure of exactly how much we need to save. What we can say is that if we only need to cut 20 posts, to save the money we’ve got to save, then that’s all we will do.