



Report No: **61/2011**

Public Agenda Item: **Yes**

Title: **Consultation on the Maritime & Coastguard Agency's proposals for modernising the Coastguard 2010**

Wards
Affected: **All Wards in Torbay**

To: **Harbour Committee**

On: **14 March 2011**

Key Decision: **No**

Change to
Budget: **No**

Change to
Policy
Framework: **No**

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1. What we are trying to achieve and the impact on our customers

- 1.1 The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) has launched a consultation on proposals for modernising the Coastguard.
- 1.2 This report seeks to raise the debate with the Harbour Committee and to agree a means of responding to the consultation.
- 1.3 The Coastguard plays a key role in monitoring the threat of oil pollution and responding to maritime incidents that threaten our coastline.
- 1.4 The Coastguard's Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) at Brixham is under threat of closure. Given the level of maritime activity in Tor Bay and off the South Devon coast, combined with the high numbers of residents and visitors that enjoy our waters it isn't surprising that our community has come to trust in the valuable service provided by Brixham Coastguard. Our customers are obviously concerned about the possible loss of this critical facility and it is therefore important that the Harbour Authority sends a response to this consultation.

2. Recommendation(s) for decision

- 2.1 **That, the Executive Head of Tor Bay Harbour Authority, in consultation with the Chairman of the Harbour Committee, respond to the Maritime & Coastguard Agency's consultation on the proposals for modernising the Coastguard.**

2.2 That the Committee note the draft consultation response set out in Appendix 2 and make any additional recommendations to the Executive Head of Tor Bay Harbour Authority and/or the Chairman of the Harbour Committee.

3. Key points and reasons for recommendations

3.1 On 16th December 2010 the MCA launched a consultation document entitled *“Protecting our Seas and Shores in the 21st Century – Consultation on proposals for modernising the Coastguard 2010”*. The document is attached to this report as Appendix 1. Any response to this consultation must be made by the closing date of 24th March 2011.

3.2 On the 2nd February 2011 at a full Council meeting it was unanimously agreed to direct the Executive Head of Tor Bay Harbour Authority to prepare a response, in consultation with the Mayor and political group leaders, to the Government’s consultation on behalf of the Council expressing its wish that other methods of reducing the Maritime and Coastguards Agency budget are explored instead of closing the Brixham Station.

For more detailed information on this proposal please refer to the supporting information attached.

**Captain Kevin Mowat
Executive Head of Tor Bay Harbour Authority
Tor Bay Harbour Master**

Supporting information to Report 61/2011

A1. Introduction and history

- A1.1 For two centuries, the Coastguard has been helping to manage the use of our seas and protect those who use them. The sea is vital to our economy, while millions use it for recreational purposes. However, we are changing the way we use our waters and our shores. This is making our coastline far busier than ever before. We are building much larger ships that are less manoeuvrable and drilling rigs and increasing numbers of wind farms pepper the seas around the UK. As a result our seas are becoming much more congested. Weather conditions are also becoming more extreme, with significant weather events becoming more frequent and severe, making work at sea more perilous and increasing the risk of coastal flooding. However, updated technologies and systems, including automated systems to track ships wherever they might be, offer the MCA real opportunities to manage better what is going on around our coasts and to deal with incidents when they arise. At the same time, in the current economic conditions there is an expectation that the MCA will need to deliver efficiencies and reduce costs.
- A1.2 The current arrangement of the Coastguard dates back forty years and the MCA believes it is not well placed to respond to the challenges identified above. Eighteen Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres are spread across the UK, together with a small centre in London. Each centre's systems are 'paired' with a neighbour allowing them to work together when necessary, but beyond these pairings the stations are not interoperable. This means that the system suffers from a fundamental lack of resilience. In the event of a problem affecting both centres in a pair, it is not possible for an incident to be managed from another centre. It is also impossible to spread workloads across the system; so staff in one centre may be struggling to cope with call volumes while workloads in another may be low. In addition both emergency and non-emergency demand varies widely by geographical location, the time of day, and the time of year. Analysis shows that the busiest centres handle over five times as many incidents as the quietest with 30% of all incidents happening in July and August and 70% of all incidents occurring between 9am and 7pm. The MCA state that these uneven workloads lessen resilience, hamper staff development and lead to higher than necessary staff costs.
- A1.3 It is suggested that the latest technology means the Coastguard can be completely reconfigured to deliver a more integrated and improved level of service, at lower cost, with better-rewarded staff taking on increased responsibilities and with enhanced career opportunities.
- A1.4 The MCA's consultation document sets out proposals which would enable fewer Coastguard centres to monitor and communicate with ships anywhere around the UK coastline, as well as delivering complete integration between stations. It is said that this will allow greater flexibility and improved resilience when responding to calls, particularly at peak times. In turn, these proposals would mean enhanced roles and responsibilities for a smaller number of officers, matched by improvements in remuneration.

A1.5 The proposals include :-

- Establishing two nationally networked Maritime Operations Centres, capable of managing maritime incidents wherever they occur and with improved systems to monitor ships and manage incidents. One would be located in Aberdeen, the other in the Portsmouth/Southampton area.
- The establishment of six sub-centres, fully integrated into the national network around the coast operating during daylight hours only with the exception of Dover that would continue to operate around the clock. On the basis of an evaluation of the existing sites and the facilities available at them, it is proposed four of these should be located at Dover, Falmouth, Humber and Swansea. The MCA also require sub-centres at either Belfast or Liverpool and either Stornoway or Shetland. The case for selection between these locations is more marginal. Comments and information about factors that should influence the choice of sites for these two sub-centres, have been invited. The 24/7 small centre at London would remain unchanged.
- Providing high quality and demanding jobs for Coastguard officers, with the job weight and pay reflecting the increased demands placed upon them in line with Civil Service pay guidelines.
- Strengthening the leadership and support provided to the volunteer Coastguards in the Coastguard Rescue Service who serve their local communities by providing an effective, knowledgeable and responsive local rescue service.

A1.6 The MCA proposals would reduce staff numbers. Coastguards stationed in the centres would fall from 491 today to 248, while the number of regular Coastguards supporting the volunteers in the Coastguard Rescue Service would increase from 80 to 105 to improve its operational leadership. Headquarters staff would fall from 25 to 17. Overall staffing numbers would fall from 596 today to 370 over a four-year period with higher quality and better paid jobs for those remaining. All existing staff would be given opportunities to apply for posts within the new structure. Staff leaving the service would be eligible for compensation for early exits in line with the terms of the Civil Service Compensation Scheme.

A1.7 The consultation proposes that the transition to the new service would begin in 2011/12 and take place over a four-year period. This would allow time for the new Maritime Operations Centres to be set up and a phased programme changing existing Maritime Rescue Centres into sub-centres.

A1.8 Subject to the outcome of the consultation it is likely that this could lead to redundancies. Should this be the case, we would follow the Cabinet Office protocols for handling surplus staff situations and engage with the Trade Union Side as early as possible to ensure that best efforts are made to avoid compulsory redundancies.

A1.9 Overall, the MCA believe that implementing these proposals will result in a Coastguard service fit to meet the challenges of the 21st century and capable of delivering an improved service to mariners and the general public.

A1.10 However, before any changes are made, the MCA are conducting a 14-week consultation. The consultation document sets out the background to the proposed changes, the main effects, and provides some questions to assist the reader when submitting a response. In developing their proposals, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency would welcome comments and information about factors that should influence the choice of sites for both Maritime Operations Centres and for sub-centres. Responses will be accepted up until 5pm on 24th March, 2011.

A2. Risk assessment of preferred option

A2.1 Outline of significant key risks

A2.1.1 There is an obvious and significant risk to public safety if the Coastguard's ability and capacity to respond to maritime emergencies is reduced by the MCA's current proposals to modernise the Coastguard.

A2.1.2 It would be a missed opportunity if Tor Bay Harbour Authority failed to respond to this consultation or to raise the concerns highlighted in A2.1.1 above.

A2.1.2 The MCA has produced its own risk assessment of its proposals to modernise the Coastguard and this can be found at www.mcga.gov.uk.

A2.2 Remaining risks

A2.2.1 There is a small risk that the Coastguard might not modernise appropriately for the 21st century.

A3. Other Options

A3.1 Not to respond to the MCA's consultation exercise.

A4. Summary of resource implications

A4.1 A modest amount of Officer time will be required to compose a suitable response.

A5. What impact will there be on equalities, environmental sustainability and crime and disorder?

A5.1 This consultation is of a technical nature, and is therefore race, gender and disability non-specific.

A5.2 Tor Bay Harbour's built and natural environment is of great importance and as such needs to benefit from every available protection from the potential threat posed from the possibility of oil pollution. The Coastguard play a key role in monitoring the threat of oil pollution and responding to maritime incidents that threaten our coastline. An oil spill could have a significant impact on our environment, the local economy and the community of Torbay. The proposals for modernising the Coastguard might impact on the Coastguard's ability and capacity to respond to such incidents.

A5.4 There are no obvious impacts on crime and disorder.

A6. Consultation and Customer Focus

A6.1 Both the Torquay/Paignton Harbour Liaison Forum and the Brixham Harbour Liaison Forum have been consulted on the MCA's proposals to gauge their respective views.

A7. Are there any implications for other Business Units?

A7.1 No other Business Units will be affected by the recommendation contained in this report. Any response to this consultation will be on behalf of the Council as a harbour authority. Other Council departments may respond separately.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Protecting our Seas and Shores in the 21st Century – Consultation on proposals for modernising the Coastguard 2010

Appendix 2 Draft Response by Tor Bay Harbour Authority and Torbay Council to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's Consultation on proposals for modernising the Coastguard

Documents available in members' rooms

None

Background Papers:

The following documents/files were used to compile this report:

Protecting our Seas and Shores in the 21st Century – Consultation on proposals for modernising the Coastguard 2010