



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE
AUTHORITY**

Item 25/51

MEETING	Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority
DATE OF MEETING	09 December 2025
SUBJECT OF THE REPORT	Monitoring Officer arrangements
STATUS OF REPORT	For publication
PURPOSE OF REPORT	To review and approve
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>At their meeting in June 2025, Members considered an exempt report regarding the extension of interim arrangements for the Authority's Monitoring Officer provision. Approval was granted for this extension for a further 12 months, through to 30 June 2026.</p> <p>Members acknowledged that the current arrangement has proved effective and this view is also reflected by Officers in terms of resilience and continuity.</p> <p>It is proposed that a long-term permanent arrangement is now put in place through a competitive procurement process.</p>
RISK ASSESSMENT	None for the purposes of this report.
COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT	None for the purposes of this report
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT	None for the purposes of this report
BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	There will be an annual revenue cost associated with this approach, in line with the budget that has been in place for the past 2 years.
RECOMMENDATION	Members are asked to:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Approve the long-term commitment to procure a Monitoring Officer and legal services provision to run from 1 July 2026 for a minimum of 2 years with the option to extend the contract by a further 2 years. ii. Approve that delegated authority is provided to the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Authority to award the provider from the procurement process and designate a Monitoring Officer from the successful provider.
BACKGROUND PAPERS	<p>Paper 25/26 Extension of Interim Monitoring Officer arrangements. 11 June 2025</p> <p>Paper 24/34 Exempt Clerking and Monitoring Officer arrangements. 12 June 2024.</p> <p>Paper 24/66 Exempt Interim Monitoring Officer arrangements. 10 December 2024.</p>
APPENDIX	None
REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT	<p>Vikki Shearing, Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority vikki.shearing@dwfire.org.uk Tel no: 07880712319</p>

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At their meeting in December 2024, Members approved interim arrangements for the provision of a legally qualified Monitoring Officer through a six-month contract. This arrangement commenced on 1 January 2025 and ran until 30 June 2025.
- 1.2 In June 2025, Members approved an extension of this arrangement for a further 12 months, until June 2026, to allow time to consider long-term options while ensuring continuity of service during a period of organisational challenge.
- 1.3 Members noted that the existing arrangements were effective and recognised the risks associated with pursuing a partnership with another local authority at a time of sector-wide resourcing pressures.
- 1.4 Members also delegated authority to the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Authority, to agree the terms of the contract with VWV LLP and to formally designate a Monitoring Officer under that agreement.

2. Proposal for Long-Term Arrangements

- 2.1 Given the limited opportunities to partner with another fire and rescue service, and the effectiveness of the current commercial arrangements, it is proposed, following consultation with the Chair of the Authority, that Members approve the continuation of this model through a commercial provider and the benefits associated with this approach are outlined below.
- 2.2 **Specialist Expertise** - they can provide access to a broad range of legal and governance specialists, including expertise in standards, data protection, HR management, procurement, and public law.
- 2.3 **Independence** – they operate independently of local political or inter-authority pressures, supporting impartial decision-making and reducing potential conflicts of interest, particularly as our Authority serves multiple local areas.
- 2.4 **Consistency and Continuity** - they offer stable support that is not affected by local government restructures, elections, or internal staffing changes.
- 2.5 **Professional Accountability** - they operate under defined contractual terms and are regulated by professional bodies such as the Solicitors Regulation Authority, offering clear performance standards and recourse if service levels are not met.
- 2.6 **Flexibility and Innovation** - they can be tailored to the Authority's needs and may offer cost efficiencies over time compared with maintaining in-house or shared-service arrangements, with access to modern governance and technical solutions.

- 2.7 While there may be higher upfront costs and less embedded local knowledge compared with a local authority partnership, it is the view of officers that the advantages of the commercial model outweigh these limitations.

3. Legal and Budgetary Considerations

- 3.1 Subject to Member approval, a formal procurement process will be undertaken to establish a long-term contract for the provision of Monitoring Officer and associated legal services. This will ensure a robust, transparent, and compliant process.
- 3.2 This approach ensures continuity of statutory Monitoring Officer provision and compliance with procurement regulations through a formal, competitive process.
- 3.3 The anticipated annual cost of the contract would be in line with current and recent budget allocations for Monitoring Officer services.

4. Summary

- 4.1 If approved, officers will commence a competitive procurement process in January 2026, with a view to having the new contract in place by June 2026.
- 4.2 It is recommended that the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Authority be delegated authority to award the contract to the successful provider following the procurement process.
- 4.3 The existing delegation to the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Authority, to designate a Monitoring Officer under the terms of the agreement with the successful provider, would remain in place for the duration of the contract.