



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE**  
**FIRE AND RESCUE**

Item 24/12 Appendix A



# Productivity and efficiency plan

2024

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The broader economic environment and outlook remains a challenge for all public services such as our own. We have experienced rapid and spiralling inflation and now feeling the effects of significant increases in the prices of goods and services across many areas. We have little scope to secure fixed prices with our suppliers who are often passing on costs associated with supply chain imbalances and significant salary demands and agreements. We also need to fund significant pay awards arising from the cost of living crisis. Volatility, rapid cost increases and on-going uncertainty are making it very difficult for us to plan, deliver and be financially assured. Efficiency and productivity as an all embracing leadership drive is a fundamental mitigation for us and central to our approach to securing greater financial stability.

From an income perspective, the finance settlement for Fire and Rescue Authorities for 2024-25 set a 3% core council tax referendum threshold. The £5 precept flexibility offered to all standalone Fire and Rescue Authorities in 2023-24 was not extended. A number of grants were increased in line with September CPI, and other grants that were due to cease based on previous announcements now continue into 2024-25. However, no certainty beyond this has been provided and the level of non-core grant funding represents a significant financial risk.

Pressures remain across the fire sector with regards to ensuring sufficient capacity and funding remain available to meet the spiralling costs of running the Service.

As part of the Spending Review 2021-22, the National Fire Chiefs Council and the Local Government Association made a commitment on behalf of the fire sector in England to create 2% of non-pay efficiencies and to increase productivity of the fire sector by 3% by 2024-25.

This efficiency and productivity statement has been requested by the Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire. The document augments our efficiency plan required under the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. More specifically, this document sets out our approach, current position, and future plans to achieving efficiency and productivity gains. Further information about many of the areas described here may be found in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024-28 available from our website.

## 2. INCOME, EXPENDITURE & FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

### INCOME

#### Government support

The Final Local Government Finance Settlement announced on 5 February 2024 showed an overall increase in Core Spending Power of £4.1m for 2024-25, although £1.8m of this related to local council tax funding. Our revenue support grant was increased in line with September 2023 CPI of 6.7%, with the historical pension grant allocation of £2.7m now also rolled-in. There was an increase of £0.2m in assumed business rates income, and Top-Up grant was recalculated in line with the April 2023 national revaluation of business rates. Although the increase in funding is welcome, overall, our government Settlement Funding Assessment has still reduced from £19.426m (accumulated as two separate Authorities) in 2015-16 to £16.009m in 2024-25 (excluding the historical pension grant allocation),

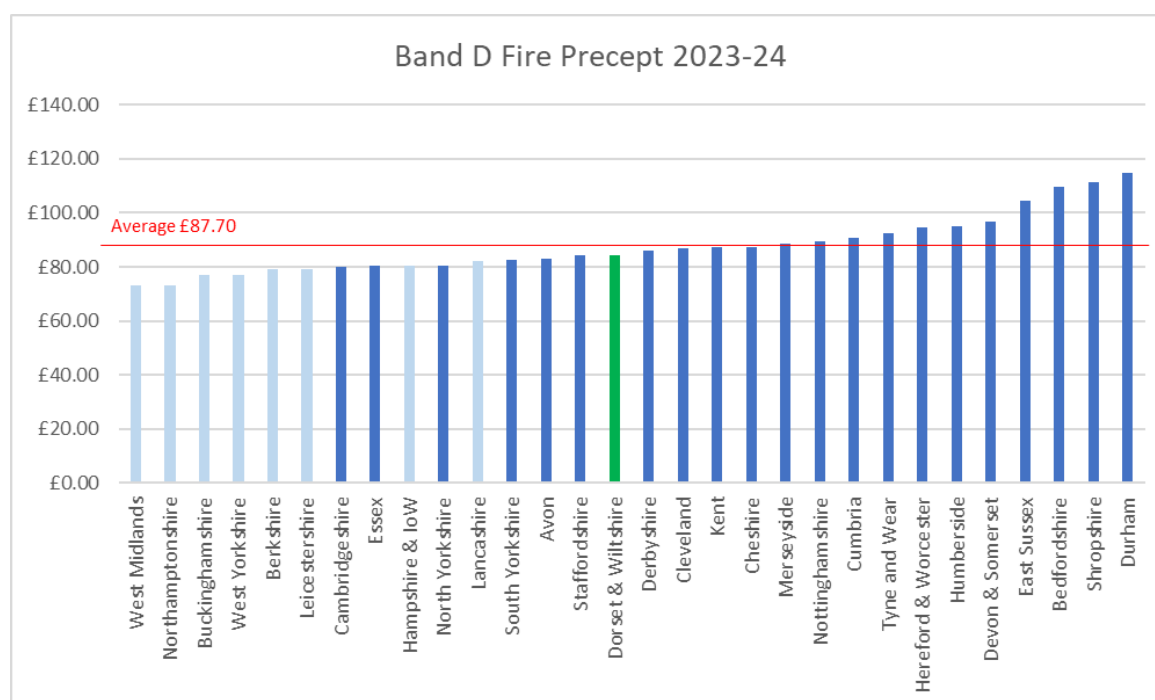
representing a cash reduction of £3.4m or 17.6% over the period since 2015-16.

The 'Services' grant introduced in 2022-23 continues in 2024-25, but our allocation has reduced by 83% from £423k in 2023-24 to £73k in 2024-25. The 'one-off funding guarantee' grant introduced in 2023-24 has now been continued into 2024-25. Its purpose in 2023-24 was to ensure that all local authorities, including FRAs, see at least a 3% increase in their Core Spending Power before any decisions about organisational efficiencies, use of reserves or council tax levels. That percentage has been increased to 4% in 2024-25, and our allocation has increased from £155k to £1,632k. The Settlement also continues to provide a Rural Services grant to 'super-sparse' areas and our share of this has increased to £67k.

## Precepts

The Authority has a history of being a low funding, low spending authority. Currently, only 32% of our funding is provided centrally, with the remaining 68% coming from local council tax funding. This reflects the £3.4m reduction in central funding that the Authority has seen since 2015-16. The low level of funding inevitably places pressure on levels of fire precept. Our 2023-24 fire precept figure of £84.43 compares to a national average for all standalone FRAs of £87.70 (see graph below).

GRAPH: BAND D FIRE PRECEPT 2023-24 (ALL STAND-ALONE FRAS)



In summary, the table below shows the total funding assumed to 2027-28 based on the finance principles and assumptions outlined in our MTFP:

TABLE: TOTAL FUNDING REQUIREMENT

Funding requirement	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
	Actual	Estimated	Estimated	Estimated	Estimated
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Fire Precept (£m)	47.971	49.819	51.318	52.860	54.451
Council tax Collection Fund Surplus/Deficit (-) (£m)	0.378	0.186	0.000	0.000	0.000
Revenue Support Grant (RSG) (£m)	4.403	7.398	7.398	7.398	7.398
BRR and Top Up grant (£m)	10.108	10.679	10.679	10.679	10.679
Business rates Collection Fund Surplus/Deficit (-) (£m)	0.147	0.600	0.000	0.000	0.000
Other government grants	3.706	5.237	4.577	4.577	4.577
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>66.713</b>	<b>73.919</b>	<b>73.972</b>	<b>75.514</b>	<b>77.105</b>

## BUDGET REQUIREMENT FOR 2024-25

Taking all of the changes into account, the net budget requirement for 2024-25 is £73.919m as summarised:

TABLE: BUDGET REQUIREMENT 2024-25

Revenue Budget	Budget 2024-25 £m
- Employees	60.217
- Premises	4.590
- Transport	1.545
- Supplies & services	6.181
- Agency & contracted out	2.997
- Democratic representation	0.116
- Capital financing/leasing	5.113
- Income	-6.026
- Transfers to/from reserves	-0.814
<b>Net budget requirement</b>	<b>73.919</b>

## MEDIUM TERM FORECAST

The table below shows updated projections of the Authority's budget requirement from 2023-24 to 2026-27 based on the agreed Financial Principles, current data received from our

constituent authorities, Service spending proposals and our Strategic Assessment of Risk, previously outlined our MTFP.

TABLE: FORECASTED REVENUE BUDGET 2024-25 TO 2027-28

Revenue budget	2024-25 £m	2025-26 £m	2026-27 £m	2027-28 £m
- Employees	60.217	61.027	62.016	63.274
- Premises	4.590	4.553	4.543	4.641
- Transport	1.545	1.516	1.542	1.569
- Supplies & services	6.181	6.548	6.651	6.773
- Contract out services	2.997	3.044	3.038	3.057
- Democratic rep	0.116	0.118	0.120	0.120
- Capital financing	5.113	5.030	5.220	5.905
- Reserve transfers	-6.026	-5.508	-5.244	-5.263
- Income	-0.814	-0.332	0.116	0.120
Service budget requirement	<b>73.919</b>	<b>75.996</b>	<b>78.002</b>	<b>80.196</b>

Looking beyond 2024-25, based on our funding assumptions and forecast spending plans we have indicative funding deficits of £2.024m rising to £3.091m between 2025-26 and 2027-28 respectively:

TABLE: FORECASTED FUNDING GAPS/DEFICITS

Funding gap	2024-25 £m	2025-26 £m	2026-27 £m	2027-28 £m
Total funding	<b>73.919</b>	<b>73.972</b>	<b>75.514</b>	<b>77.105</b>
Estimated net service budget	<b>73.919</b>	<b>75.996</b>	<b>78.002</b>	<b>80.196</b>
Budget surplus (+) / deficit (-)	<b>0.000</b>	<b>-2.024</b>	<b>-2.488</b>	<b>-3.091</b>

## CAPITAL EXPENDITURE AND FINANCING

The capital programme, covering the anticipated revised programme for 2023-24 and requirements through to 2027-28, is shown in the table below. The revised amounts shown for 2023-24 include projects carried forward from 2022-23 and anticipated in-year changes to the programme. The capital programme for 2024-25 totals £14.0m, the majority of which will require funding through prudential borrowing.

TABLE: CAPITAL PROGRAMME

Capital programme	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
	Estimate	Indicative	Indicative	Indicative	Indicative
<b>Capital Budget</b>	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>
Property/Estates	1.437	7.996	2.875	1.437	1.473
Vehicles	4.450	3.284	2.744	2.521	6.444
Equipment	0.238	0.358	1.836	1.485	1.322



ICT	0.970	2.390	2.170	1.228	0.445
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7.094</b>	<b>14.028</b>	<b>9.624</b>	<b>6.671</b>	<b>9.684</b>
<b>Financed By</b>					
Prudential Borrowing	5.636	9.839	6.067	3.368	9.084
Revenue Contributions/Reserves	1.458	4.189	3.557	3.303	0.600
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7.094</b>	<b>14.028</b>	<b>9.624</b>	<b>6.671</b>	<b>9.684</b>

## Financing the capital programme

At the current time, all available capital receipts of the Authority have been used to finance previous capital expenditure programmes. Previously the Authority has been able to use some reserves to offset long-term borrowing in supporting its capital investment plans. Savings planned in previous revenue budgets and changes to the reserves strategy have allowed the Authority to set aside funds to support future capital investment and reduce borrowing costs. The revenue budget also includes an annual contribution of £600k to support the financing of the capital programme. An additional sum of £500k is included in 2024-25 as a result of one-off additional funding being received.

The Authority will first utilise all of the funding streams highlighted above as the cheapest form of funding, but any shortfall of funding has to be made up from prudential borrowing.

The Authority has used internal borrowing for the financing the capital programme for a number of years, i.e., rather than borrowing we have used internal cash flows as this has been more efficient and economical, particularly when investment returns have been at such low levels. This has resulted in an under-borrowing position of £16.3m on 31 March 2023, and we estimate this strategy has resulted in annual budget savings in excess of £500k. Such a position is not sustainable in the longer term and needs to be balanced with how we utilise our reserves and balances and ensuring that our cash balances are adequate.

The savings made in capital financing costs allow the Authority to set aside £600k each year to reduce the long-term capital financing and borrowing requirements, plus a further amount of £500k in 2024-25 as a result of additional one-off funding. This is a sensible strategy to reduce the pressure on future budgets from unsustainable rises in capital financing costs.

The capital financing budget currently includes provision for prudential borrowing of £9.8m in respect of 2024-25 programme, with a further £18.5m to be borrowed over the following three years to 2027-28. The estimated total over the four years is therefore £28.3m, which compares to £24.2m in the previous capital strategy when you include the required training centre investment.

## RESERVES

### General reserve

An annual review of reserves is carried out as part of the budget setting cycle. A risk assessment of the adequacy of General Balances is carried out annually to determine the extent to which the Authority is exposed to uninsured and unbudgeted losses. The risk assessment for the coming financial year, 2024-25, has been prepared as part of the budget setting process and is shown in the MTFP. The impact and scale of potential losses has been estimated to calculate a potential net financial impact of around £3.15m. At the start of

2024-25 General Balances are expected to be at £3.1m and will increase to £3.15m during the year.

### Earmarked reserves

We have a number of earmarked reserves which have been established for specific purposes where there have been timing differences at budget setting or year end, or emerging risks or cost pressures. The relevance of, and balance in, each of these is reviewed annually. A significant amount of funding has been set aside in reserves to support the change necessary to deliver the Community Safety Plan. 'Investment for improvement' reserves have, and are being, used to invest in transformation projects and the development of our people which will support the modernisation of the Service. These 'investment for improvement' reserves, which are subject to regular review, are detailed in the MTFP.

### Unused grants reserves

These reserves relate to grants which have been given to the Authority, which have either not been fully spent or have been received in advance of intended spend. Where a grant has been received in advance, the Authority's policy is to transfer the funding to an earmarked reserve for spending in future years.

TABLE: UNUSED GRANTS RESERVES

	Balance 1 Apr 23 £m	Forecast spend 23-24 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 24 £m	Forecast spend 24-25 to 27-28 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 28 £m
Prevention	0.278	-0.018	0.260	-0.260	0.000
National resilience	0.208	-0.050	0.158	-0.158	0.000
Fire protection	0.027	0.000	0.027	-0.027	0.000
Transformation grant	0.235	-0.075	0.160	-0.160	0.000
Emergency Services Mobile Communication Project (ESMCP)	0.750	0.000	0.750	-0.750	0.000
Covid-19	0.211	-0.211	0.000	0.000	0.000
Other small grants	0.426	-0.136	0.290	-0.290	0.000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2.135</b>	<b>-0.490</b>	<b>1.645</b>	<b>-1.645</b>	<b>0.000</b>

### Summary - Projected reserve balances

TABLE: SUMMARY - PROJECTED RESERVE BALANCES

	Balance 1 Apr 23 £m	Forecast spend 23-24 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 24 £m	Forecast spend 24-25 to 27-28 £m	Forecast Balance 31 Mar 28 £m
<b>General reserves</b>	<b>3.052</b>	<b>0.050</b>	<b>3.102</b>	<b>0.227</b>	<b>3.329</b>
<b>Earmarked reserves</b>	<b>14.476</b>	<b>-0.095</b>	<b>14.381</b>	<b>-12.692</b>	<b>1.689</b>
<b>Unused grants reserves</b>	<b>2.136</b>	<b>-0.491</b>	<b>1.645</b>	<b>-1.645</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19.664</b>	<b>-0.536</b>	<b>19.128</b>	<b>-14.110</b>	<b>5.018</b>

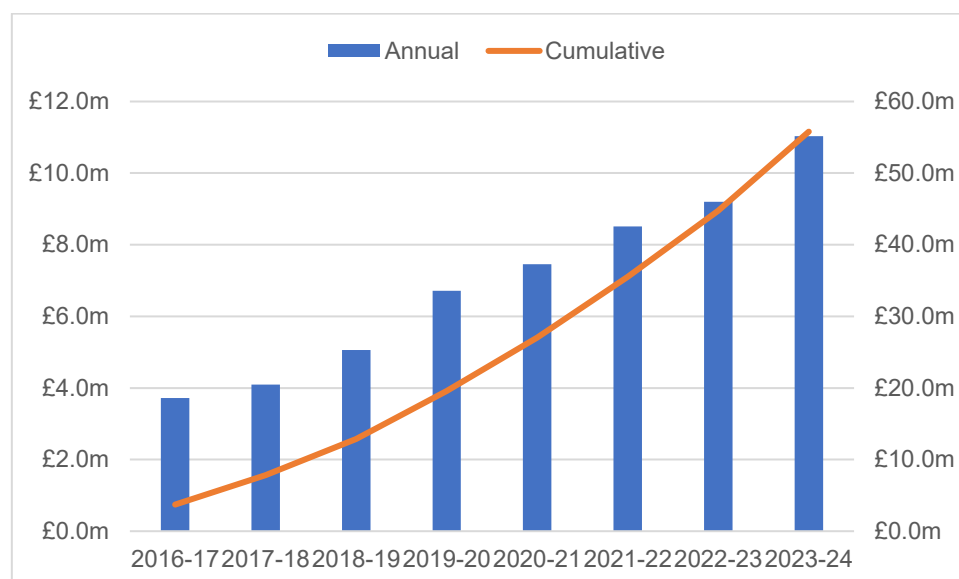


### 3. DELIVERING EFFICIENCY AND PRODUCTIVITY

#### OUR JOURNEY SO FAR

Since 1 April 2016 when the new Authority and Service was established annual cashable efficiencies of £11.0m had been realised by March 2024. This covered savings of £6.7m delivered by March 2020 aligned to our business case for combining the two legacy fire and rescue services and authorities, £5.8m of which came from staffing changes, and additional savings of £4.3m delivered between the 2020-21 and 2023-24 financial years.

CHART: ANNUAL EFFICIENCY SAVINGS



#### RESOURCING AND SAVINGS PROGRAMME

Overall costs have increased significantly and despite the welcome increase in funding for 2023-24 with the £5 council tax flexibility this has not been sustained into 2024-25. The Service now faces some difficult choices to achieve a sustainable budget and MTFP after 2024-25. Officers have set a target of saving a further £2.5m annually within the next 12-24 months.





Following the development of the new 2024-2028 Community Risk Management Plan (our Community Safety Plan), the Service will be reviewing the disposition and productivity of its operational resources. Whilst numerous changes have already been made to frontline delivery, a new comprehensive review of how we respond to fires and other emergencies has been completed. This review takes into account the changing picture of risk and demand in the Service area.

Having completed the comprehensive fire cover review, we know that, with some difficult decisions, we have opportunities to better match our resources to the risks we face. We must take these difficult decisions to adopt a risk-based approach to maximise the productivity and efficiency of the operational resources across the whole of the area in a financially viable and sustainable way. This will mean some challenging choices to stop, redesign and in some cases invest in operational response, with an overall objective to save £2.5m per year.

## A SOUND REPUTATION

Our 2022 inspection by HMICFRS was undertaken over a period of six weeks and provided an exhaustive and robust external validation and accreditation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the Service. When the results of the inspection were published in January 2023, we were delighted to be judged as 'Outstanding' in the pillar around 'Efficiency' - which is about how everyone in the service spends public money and uses resources - and 'Good' in the two pillars of 'Effectiveness' and 'People.'

Furthermore, within the Efficiency pillar itself, as well as an overall 'Outstanding' judgement, we were also graded as 'Outstanding' against the sub-diagnostic '*Making the best use of its resources*'.

Question	This inspection	2018/19
 <b>Efficiency</b>	 <b>Outstanding</b>	<b>Good</b>
Making best use of resources	 Outstanding	Good
Future affordability	 Good	Good

## OUR APPROACH AND PLANS

Our approach to ensuring efficiency and productivity is all encompassing and engrained in everything we do. It is a core leadership drive for us that is widely discussed and embedded with our managers and staff. The following section sets out our approach and gives a flavour of some of the successes we have had along with our on-going work or future plans.

### UNDERSTANDING INVESTMENT NEED AND DELIVERY

- **Scrutinising every line.** We have an extensive process of costing all functions and budget lines across all departments. This has included zero basing all revenue budgets and reducing expenditure where appropriate. To support this on-going financial exercise, we have also fully considered all of the savings suggested by staff and fed back to them. We have also further strengthened the strategic challenge to our property improvement programme, with directors now collectively scrutinising the requirement for any works to a much lower level of expenditure than before.
- **Key strategies are in place** to underpin the delivery of the Community Safety Plan that is itself informed by a Strategic Assessment of Risk. These strategies include Community Safety, ICT, Fleet and equipment, Estates, Environment, People and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Future investment needs stemming from these strategies are captured within the MTFP. These strategies ensure that the work of our departments and stations are fully aligned to the needs and aspirations of the Service and that time and money is used on things that are central to the delivery of the strategic aspiration set out in the Community Safety Plan. These strategies also supported our

pursuit of achieving to ISO 55001 (Asset management) that we were accredited for in 2023. This standard has at its heart efficiency, effectiveness, and cost management. The standard is particularly central to our approach given that fleet, equipment, and property investments represents such a huge element of our non-pay expenditure.

- **Business cases underpin all investments.** Where a new investment need is identified through either a key strategy or from a department, a comprehensive business case is then formulated and approved. Our business case management process challenges organisational need, whole life investment requirements, and both the deliverables and benefits to be realised. Once scrutinised and approved, these are tracked through performance management and business benefits reviewed in line with the approved business case. Any in-year departmental underspends are centrally collated and are prioritised towards funding business cases. Our internal auditors assessed our business case evaluation process in quarter 3 of 2022-23 and gave a 'substantial' assurance rating against it.
- **Project management drives complex work.** To ensure that investment needs are managed in a coordinated and cost efficient manner, the business case process determines if a more structured project framework is required to be followed. Where it is, a clear methodology exists within the Service's planning and performance management system. Our approach to project management and evaluation has received a 'substantial' assurance from external auditors.

## BENCHMARKING AND ADOPTING GOOD PRACTICE

- **Benchmarking is used to see how we are doing.** As part of our desire to benchmark our performance, we have a range of benchmarking arrangements. These include benchmarking across a range of key performance indicators with like sized fire and rescue services; using the HMICFRS process to identify and appropriately adopt best practice elsewhere within the sector. We also actively participate in a number of specialist groups to identify and adopt better practices in a range of areas such as fleet, equipment, people, risk, environment, financial management, health and safety and operations. In addition to this, we work closely with our auditors to design an audit programme based upon risk and the eight themes of a healthy organisation. This enables us to review and strengthen our approach as well as provide assurance.

## PERFORMANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY MANAGEMENT

- **Performance and scrutiny arrangements are in place.** The Service has extensive and comprehensive planning and performance management arrangements aligned to the HMICFRS methodology. All departments have a performance dashboard that is reviewed on a monthly basis. As well as monthly performance monitoring, performance against the Service Delivery Plan is comprehensively reviewed on a quarterly basis by a cross directorate Service Delivery Team that is chaired by directors. Performance is reported in a structured way against the HMICFRS methodology to Members via meetings of the Authority, Finance and Audit and Local Performance and Scrutiny committees. These reports are achieved in the form of detailed presentations to the Authority and the Annual report both made available to the public and other stakeholders via the website.

- **VFM tool and dashboard are used at all levels.** We have developed a comprehensive VFM tool and dashboard. This tool enables us to better understand and consistently quantify a number of internal and public facing activities to determine and report upon costs and cashable, non-cashable and societal savings within a 6-monthly VFM statement and through our performance management reporting arrangements. For example, based upon a 1% reduction on accidental dwelling fires, last year, our safe and well programme generated an estimated £5.9m in societal savings and savings for the Service of £112k by not sending resources to preventable dwelling fires. Our road traffic education programme, based on a 1% success rate delivered estimated societal savings of £10.7m, a cost avoidance of £46k and non-cashable savings of £32k. We believe that by setting our value in tangible monetary terms this has helped us secure in excess of £1.12m in sponsorship since 2017 including a grant of £285k from SGN and Wales & West Utilities to fit carbon monoxide and Wi-Fi alarms over a five year period.
- **Operational productivity is a key focus.** All stations have a station performance 'How's my Team Doing' dashboard. This captures the key activities undertaken including the time taken, time when the activity was undertaken, and the key outputs delivered. These dashboards, which are aligned to the performance management framework and associated meeting structures, enable us to accurately monitor productivity of wholetime crews. Each station has bespoke station and community risk profiles and action plan to ensure that its activities and resources are effectively targeted to address the areas of highest community risk. Together these systems are used to inform and direct station management practices to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity.

In addition to a closer oversight of station activity, we have a range of other important initiatives. These include:

- Where appropriate, moving a large number of learning events to on-line and reviewing our approach to e-learning more generally
- Using our operational crews to undertake business fire safety checks
- Analysing the work activities of crews to optimise night time working – linking this to our performance dashboard
- Working with the Fire Brigades Union to assess and enhance night time productivity
- **Evaluating our prevention programmes.** We have conducted a comprehensive evaluation of our prevention programmes and its associated activities. This evaluation has considered the inputs, outputs and outcomes so far achieved and has both reviewed the VFM and performance management arrangements. All key partnerships have been scrutinised. Amongst other things, this work is being used to tighten and prioritise resource allocation and to identify actions to deliver improved efficiency and productivity.

## PROCUREMENT AND CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

- **Procurement and basket of goods help us focus on VFM.** The Service has a structured approach to procurement that maximises the use of national frameworks and other collaborative opportunities to deliver economies of scale. Pre-engagement activity occurs with suppliers. For example, in 2022, in preparation for the procurement for the 2023-24 estates programme we held an all-day engagement session – trying to get more local companies to

understand and be able to tender for the work. We aim to do more of this as we move forward with procurement. Procurement plans are being aligned within the Networked Fire Services Partnership (NFSP) to create further opportunities for joint procurement and the purchase of common fleet and equipment as practices become more consistent across the partnership. In addition, the Service undertakes a 'basket of goods' exercise that has shown that our spend across this nationally selected range of goods is below the average for fire and rescue services in England. Our internal auditors assessed our procurement practices in quarter 4 of 2022-23 and gave them a 'substantial' assurance rating.

- **Our strategic approach to Category Management** starts with careful project management from the outset. Stakeholder engagement is undertaken across the service and wider partnerships, we also consult with internal and external subject matter experts whenever necessary. By doing this, we look for opportunities to consolidate and streamline our spending in areas where similar investments, purchases, or contracts are required.
- **Contract management is a key discipline.** All of our contract managers must complete an e-learning programme and are required to undertake appropriate contract management to ensure that VFM is being achieved. Contract lifetimes are awarded and maintained in line with financial regulations to ensure VFM is maintained. We are also actively monitoring critical suppliers and taking as much action as we can to mitigate increases from supply chain disruption and potential cost increases.
- **Frameworks and collaborative procurement are routinely used.** At every opportunity we take advantage of framework contracts and collaborative approaches within our sector and beyond. By way of example, we are working through the Networked Fire Services Partnership to procure a new command and control system; Southwest Police Procurement Department on business travel; Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Service on station mobilising equipment and the National Fire Chiefs Council e-tendering system. There are many more examples. In addition, we often lead the development of collaborative procurement, for example, we led a collaborative procurement to replace and upgrade mobile data terminals. As well as achieving our own savings of £236k, Crown Commercial Services have estimated that efficiency savings to the value of £805k have been achieved through the collaborative procurement process.

## RESOURCES TO RISK AND DEMAND

- **A strategic fire cover review has been undertaken.** A Service wide fire cover review has recently been completed. This will be used to support future decisions about operational cover, resource disposition, duty systems and the balance between prevention / protection and response. Significant analysis has already been undertaken at a strategic level through the Strategic Assessment of Risk. This assessment has been informed by a higher degree of 'bottom-up' analysis at a group level allowing us to better capture local pressures, risks, and planning aspirations. This fire cover review is being used to inform the next iteration of our Community Safety Plan that will be published in the summer of 2024.
- **Structural reviews are regularly undertaken.** The Service faces an array of challenges many of which are new or require a revised strategic consideration depending upon external factors or legislative changes. Every two years the Strategic Assessment of Risk is updated to help ensure that the Service is

looking strategically at this changing environment. To support this, the Service also has comprehensive workforce planning arrangements to help identify key issues, investment needs and changes to skills and workforce requirements. Since forming the new Service in 2016, all corporate departments, non-station based departments and senior management have been rationalised and realigned against the vision and single ways of working. We have also synchronised working patterns, start and finish times and work practices through an extensive programme of procedural harmonisation. Service and staffing structures are therefore routinely reviewed at a strategic or tactical level to help ensure that the right skills, competencies, and capacity exists to meet current and future needs. Our strategic workforce planning arrangements were deemed to be '*Outstanding*' in our last HMICFRS inspection.

- **Technical rescue provision has been reviewed.** We reviewed the specialist technical rescue provision and disposition from a Service-wide perspective. The aim was to provide a more consistent and effective method that better aligns resource deployment to demand and risk. This review concluded that our technical rescue resources would be best provided through a three-station model providing a full technical rescue capability at each station. This is now in place and operating well.
- **Aerial ladder platforms (ALPs) have been rationalised.** We have three ALPs that are crewed by wholetime staff and one that is crewed by on-call staff. This review looked at the number and disposition of these vehicles across the Service and was aligned with the technical rescue review. We have significantly reduced future capital spend by removing the requirement to replace a fourth ALP when it comes to end of life. This has saved us around £750k for the one-off purchase and £10k in maintenance costs.
- **'Second away' fire appliances have been reviewed.** We currently have 14 solely on-call stations with a 'second away' pumping appliance and one wholetime station at Poole with a wholetime 'second away'. The locations of these appliances were determined by the Integrated Risk Management Plans of the two legacy fire and rescue authorities that were then combined. We assessed the numbers and locations of these appliances against a range of factors including both current and future risk and demand, and current availability. This analysis has been picked up and is being taken forward following our comprehensive strategic fire cover review.
- **A wide range of duty systems operate across the Service.** There are a range of duty systems operating across the Service, these include: a traditional wholetime shift of two days, two nights and four off, day crewed duty system providing a wholetime response from the station during the day and an on-call response at night, day crewing shifts, and nine-day fortnight shifts for operational staff not attached to a station. All of these shift patterns have staff working at firefighter and supervisory manager levels providing flexible options for staff needs. Firefighter roles have been introduced in some functional areas to further improve flexibility and career opportunities as a direct result of feedback from the operational women's network. On call staff operate a wide variety of contracts ranging from 40 to 120 hours per week, in addition they all have the opportunity to undertake fixed term contracts on wholetime stations covering a broad range of working patterns. These include being posted to a specific watch at a station and following the shift pattern or working day shifts only or weekday shifts only etc and are based upon the need of the Service to optimise availability of appliances. A small crewing management team optimise this availability.



- **Wholetime crewing reviews are regularly undertaken.** Wholetime shift start, and finish times are aligned Service wide regardless of shift pattern. These shift times have been reviewed and amended to optimise productivity. In addition, we have reviewed the need to reduce watch strength at several wholetime stations whilst still maintaining technical rescue and aerial ladder capability. The review concluded that there was scope to make further reductions should our financial position not improve. In setting the revenue budget for 2023-24 we reduced total crewing numbers by 28 posts, saving around £1.4m per year.
- **Daytime duty systems have and are being reviewed.** We reviewed the crewing model at Ferndown to determine the most suitable and cost-effective crewing model to meet current and future risk and demand. This review concluded that Ferndown could move to being an on-call only station and that we should look to enhance resources in south east Wiltshire area where the risk and demand profile analysis indicates the requirement for a wholetime resource during the day. We have introduced a wholetime day crewed structure at Amesbury Fire Station in early 2024 to provide improved fire cover in the south east Wiltshire. The Amesbury day-crewed structure requires 12 wholetime posts at an annual cost of around £600k.
- **On-call duty system is a financially efficient 'pay-as-you-go' service.** In addition to the arrangements on wholetime stations, the Service currently has on-call firefighters operating from 46 of its 50 stations. This provides an extremely efficient 'pay as you go' response service. On-call pay modelling has been overhauled to improve availability whilst providing contractual flexibility. In order to support a balanced budget, we have also removed one on-call firefighter post from ALL stations and sections from the staffing establishment. An evaluation framework has been established to support our approach to on-call salary management. We regularly scrutinise all cost information including wholetime and on-call station running expenditure compared with similar stations and previous years usage. This information is electronic and aggregated to enable strategic and tactical managerial oversight and cost control. We are also the national Co-chair for the NFCC on-call group.
- **Fire crews carry out combined prevention, protection, and operational checks** to ascertain whether further action is required to make the building as safe as possible from fire, but this also helps fire crews have a better understanding of the issues they may face if they were ever called to a fire at those premises, thus aiding and improving operational response. The risk information through the associated audits is captured at scene and entered directly into a tablet device. Operational crews are able to make priority referrals whilst on site to provide safeguarding and support our customers. The real benefit is that fire crews can directly submit information relating to the premises thus removing the need to complete additional emails, forms, or referrals on their return to the fire station. All activity conducted by wholetime crews is recorded in terms of time when the activity was undertaken, location, time spend, as well as the work outputs.
- **Prevention structures and activities have been refocused.** During 2022 we reviewed our prevention offering to make it affordable and sustainable in the future. As a result we made some changes to our prevention activities and restructured the team. The changes have allowed us to continue with much of the work that we already undertook, but we have ceased youth intervention programmes that were no longer financially viable for the Service in spite of yielding considerable societal savings. These changes resulted in costs

savings of £500k per year from April 2023. We continue to play an active role in a very significant range and number of prevention partnerships.

- **Demand management and charging.** We have restructured to create a greater focus and better understanding of demand and what we might do to reduce unnecessary call outs. For example, we have significantly strengthened our policy on when we respond to commercial automatic fire alarms. Last year, this has saved us £30k in cash payments for avoidable turn outs by on-call firefighters and £67k in non-cashable, time savings for firefighters working on the wholetime duty system to enable them to do more prevention, fire safety and training activities. In addition to this, we have refreshed our charging policy for some special services, adding an additional layer of operational and financial challenge to non-life-threatening rescues and incidents.
- **Dynamic operational coverage tool.** We are enhancing our technological capabilities to assist decision making for the deployment of operational resources. The Dynamic Coverage Tool (DCT) will provide a comprehensive overview of the location of our operational resources in comparison to known risks and historical incident demand across our service area. Positioned primarily within our service control centre (SCC), the DCT will be utilised by our control staff to ensure an optimal availability of emergency resources balanced against assessed risk and anticipated areas of demand. The DCT will play a crucial role in decision-making concerning standby appliance requirements and the strategic movement of resources during significant incidents or periods of heightened demand. Such scenarios often involve multiple resources, potentially leading to diminished emergency coverage in certain service areas. The DCT will empower officers to ensure a satisfactory distribution of resources, maintaining a response in alignment with our established standards. Furthermore, the efficiency and effectiveness of this technology will be augmented by integrating the entire NFSP, resulting in cost savings through procurement and implementation of the tool and enabling decisions based on resource availability across NFSP boundaries. The DCT will also inform crewing support requirements, allowing us to optimize staff utilization and additional expenses in accordance with the required level of emergency coverage relative to assessed risks.

#### **MAXIMISING OUR PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES.**

- **Prevention is achieved through strong partnerships** including safe and well; road safety; arson reduction programmes. These programmes are examined in terms of costs and cashable, non-cashable and societal savings. A VFM tool helps to ensure that the basis of this assessment is well understood and able to be benchmarked over time. Collaboration register and centralised record of partnership agreements are in place with managerial oversight. Partnership funding is used to support many of these programmes, and we have secured over £1.12m of sponsorship since 2017.
- **Protection involves close collaboration** including working jointly with other enforcement agencies. The Service works closely with other fire and rescue services and public and private sector partners to achieve its objectives of keeping the public safe and reducing the number of fires in commercial buildings. In addition, there have been a number of changes to the Service's response to automatic fire alarms that have yielded considerable cashable and non-cashable savings for the Service as outlined above. We have further

strengthened our response to unwanted commercially related automatic fire alarms to provide a 24/7 call challenge.

- **Response is broader than fire and rescues** including working with other blue light services in such activities as medical co-responding and collapsed behind closed doors. We have an agreement with the South Western Ambulance Service (SWAST) to recover all of our costs associated with co-responding. In addition to this, and as previously outlined, we have refreshed our charging policy for some special services. Again, our VFM tool is used to understand and report the internal and external savings arising from our response activities. We are also working with SWAST who as part of our support for co-responding are financing the strengthening of our clinical governance arrangements.
- **Networked Fire Services Partnership (NFSP) gives us borderless mobilisation.** Our longstanding partnership with Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service and Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service has recently expanded to include Kent Fire and Rescue Service. This partnership is supported by a Strategic Plan, board and substructures, all of which receive joint funding from the four Services. Through the NFSP, we leverage cutting-edge mobilising technology to dispatch and manage resources for operational incidents, leading to significant annual savings. The partnership's Strategic Board is currently spearheading various initiatives aimed at enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of our joint mobilising arrangements. This collaborative effort has resulted in substantial savings and productivity enhancements for all involved. By pooling resources, the partnership has achieved savings of approximately £2m through the procurement of a single, jointly acquired command and control system.
- **One public estate and sharing our property strengthens our partnerships.** Since our combination we have undertaken a fundamental review of our estate. We did this for two principal reasons. Firstly, we wanted to ensure that we have a comprehensive, prioritised and value for money led approach to our future maintenance programme. Secondly, we wanted to further identify and open up opportunities for sharing our estate with the police, local authorities, health, and other partners. We now have 16 of our 59 buildings are shared with our partners, with a number of these arrangements generating an income stream for us of £157k per annum (2023-24).

#### **STREAMLINING OUR ON-CALL FIREFIGHTER RECRUITMENT.**

- **On-call recruitment and retention are a key focus.** As the third largest employer of on-call firefighters, who operate out of 47 of our 50 stations, we have significant focus on on-call firefighter recruitment and retention. We have streamlined the recruitment processes for on-call firefighters and provided additional support for on-call stations with targeting managerial support, recruitment, and training. Recruitment events are targeted on the general working populations and under represented groups. This is supported by high levels of community engagement. We now have slightly more joiners than leavers although on-call firefighters are not staying as long as they might have done in the past. This is a national issue. A key focus for us to ensure that we maintain and improve availability whilst we maximise retention and contract efficiency. We are driving this at a local level and are vice-chairing the NFCC workstream. To support this work, we have introduced on-call recruitment dashboards to show the number of incidents a potential recruit is likely to

attend every 12 months if they provided contractual cover that we need. This is also linked to their potential earnings.

## TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- **Training and workforce planning are savings us money.** Our annual Training Plan enables us to use our training resources efficiently, therefore through good planning based on firm assumptions we know how many internal courses to run and control the targeting of external courses that are requested. In addition, staff are trained in accordance with the risks on their station ground as opposed to training everyone in everything.
- **Technology is being fully embraced.** We have embraced technology that has enabled us to realise more efficient ways of working. We now have virtual incident command development and assessments software and vans going to the station rather than the inefficiencies of firefighters travelling to assessment centres. We extensively use of body cams assessment evidence to support and reduce the need for simulated command assessments. Training now occurs via a comprehensive approach to e-learning and a large number of our leadership programmes are delivered via MS Teams significantly reducing costs and travel time.

## ESTATE MANAGEMENT

- **Maintenance is aligned to sound investment need.** Our ongoing cyclical property maintenance programme includes the outcomes of independently undertaken property conditions survey, identifying the property assets in most need of attention now and over the next few years, based on risk and priority, and reflects a seven-year refresh cycle. We do not have, and cannot afford, any property replacement programme.
- **Property is regularly reviewed.** Particularly since Covid and the acceleration of greater levels of home working, we have reviewed the need for some of our buildings. We have moved out of a rented property saving £25k pa and as part of our investment in new operational training facilities we will be moving out of a leased facility with the MoD, saving us around £250k pa (see below). We have on-going feasibility work associated with the relocation of our fire control provision to deliver a more centralised approach. Provided funds can be found to achieve, this will then release a capital receipt and allow a key station to be upgraded. Our fire station in Amesbury has been upgraded as part of improving fire cover in the south east Wiltshire area by making it a day-crewed station with an on-call section.
- **Redevelopment of our operational training centres is being delivered.** We are currently in the process of redeveloping our live fire training facility at Devizes and re-locating our training facilities at West Moors to Weymouth. This investment will create modern and fit-for-purpose facilities that will provide a carbonaceous live fire, multi storey training facility that offers a comprehensive fire, rescue, and road traffic accident training environment. The training opportunities that this will offer our firefighters will range from initial acquisition to ongoing skills refresh and development to meet the National Operational Guidance requirements and future-proof our training delivery programme. This £11m investment is being funded from a ring-fenced reserve helping to avoid the need for further capital borrowing charges. This investment will exhaust any flexibility within our financial reserves.

- **Environmental improvements reduce our carbon and save us money.** We are investing in solar panels at five key fire stations to both reduce carbon emissions but also to improve our operational resilience should there be a national power outage as outlined in the national risk register. We are also planning to put solar panels on Swindon fire station this year. We have installed smart meters to help to reduce our carbon footprint and also to deliver financial savings. Another development is a programme of replacement of fluorescent and halogen lighting with LED lighting on fire stations, improving quality of lighting and reducing energy usage. This, coupled with the improvements to heating, window and door installations, re-roofing, and fitting of insulation across the portfolio, has made our building stock more energy-efficient and provided more comfortable spaces for our colleagues to work in. Separately these are all relatively limited gains, but together they add up to notable improvement in the efficiency of our buildings. We have contracted specialist consultants to support us to deliver a decarbonisation plan to help us to better invest across the estate to reduce our carbon footprint.

## ICT AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

- **Fit for purpose ICT infrastructure central to our strategy.** As a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act, we need to ensure that our ICT infrastructure is responsive, secure, and reliable to ensure that the Service's critical functions can be maintained, and that loss of productivity through business continuity failures is avoided. We continue to invest in our ICT to ensure that it is fit for purpose, carefully balancing the use of server and cloud-based services. We have made significant financial and technical investments to secure our connection to the Emergency Services Network (ESN) which allows us to ensure greater operational resilience. We are also meeting the requirements of the Cyber Assessment Framework from the National Cyber Security Centre which ensures organisations manage and protect their information assets.
- **Smarter working gives us flexibility and saves us money.** There is an extensive programme of smarter working across the Service allowing staff to work from any location at any time. This helps to improve work-life balance for our staff thereby reducing costs associated with unwanted staff turnover. It also allows us to make considerable savings on fuel and mileage allowances and unnecessary travel time yielding both cashable and non-cashable savings and reducing our carbon footprint.
- **Responsive information reduces costs and increases speed and safety.** The Service has an extensive arrange of information management systems that support efficient and responsive decision-making. The overwhelming majority of our information systems are now electronic with many 'talking to one another' and reducing unnecessary administrators. Through our Digital Transformation Programme, all in-house systems are being migrated across from legacy systems to a common Office 365 platform to further increase the interconnectivity of information and reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and costs. Aligned to this, we are also seeking to put in place arrangements that enable us to strengthen collaboration and information sharing with our key partners. In addition we have:
  - Significantly invested in MDTs and Removable information tablets with new apps and capability so that crews can input and receive data and

information at the time that they need it without the need for subsequent administration.

- Invested in incident command software to make the administration of fireground paperwork more efficient.
- Formed an innovative partnership with Gartan Technologies to develop a module linking competencies, availability and rostering to improve oversight and the efficiency of frontline crews and resources. This is a first for the sector.

## FLEET AND EQUIPMENT

- **Vehicles are regularly reviewed against need and policy.** There has been a significant investment over the past few years that saw the replacement of 25 appliances, six off road appliances and three technical rescue vehicles. Over the following five years there is provision to replace a further 22 large fire appliances, four 4x4 fire appliances, three command and control vehicles, four water carriers, 24 FDO cars and a specialist off-road vehicle. The requirements for specialist and general vehicles are all reviewed by senior officers before being approved. Each project looks at the best way of providing the required functions, and covers consideration of vehicles, equipment, technology, and crewing requirements. We are currently reviewing the need for and disposition of our second-away fire appliances to ensure that they secure continued value for money against our changing risk and demand.
- **White, non-operational fleet has been reviewed.** All our non-operational fleet has been significantly reviewed. This has resulted in a significant reduction of cars and vans saving capital and revenue costs. We have extended the lifecycle of our replacement programme and as part of our commitment to reduced carbon and environmental management we are trialling a number of electric cars and vans.
- **Technology is helping us.** We have installed CCTV in all our fire engines and several response vehicles. This has resulted in a number of benefits, including a reduction in our avoidable accident incidents. We are in the process of determining the best way forward with installing telematics in the majority of our vehicles. This will help us collate details of how vehicles are being used and when it is identified that a vehicle is not being used as efficiently as expected. The data will also help us further improve our understanding and management of our CO<sub>2</sub> emission levels for vehicle related travel. Telematics are being fitted into non-operational fleet vehicles to monitor and track vehicle location and usage to improve efficiency and safety.
- **Our approach to asset management remains strong.** We have achieved ISO 55001 (asset management). This helps ensure that we have a systematic and cost effective approach to our fleet, equipment, PPE, and estate. This standard supports our existing compliance with ISO 45001 (health and safety) where we are one of only three fire and rescue services in England to have achieved this Service-wide accreditation. Our electronic asset management systems are being replaced with a new system to ensure that all assets are routinely checked and that any defects are reported early to help minimise safety risks and avoidable costs.
- **We are investing in an environmental project** to reduce the carbon footprint of our fleet by introducing electric vehicles into non-operational roles. Using telematics data, we are identifying the most appropriate vehicles to



invest in and ensuring the correct supporting infrastructure is in place over the next few years.

## 4. KEY MESSAGES

- We have below average costs and below average fire precept.
- We found over £11m of **annual** cashable savings since being formed in 2016.
- The Service is rated by His Majesty's Inspectorate as 'Outstanding' for Efficiency and 'Good' for Effectiveness and 'Good' for People.
- There are significant strategic financial challenges still facing us.
- Financial uncertainty, including continuing one-year only financial settlements, high inflation and significant economic challenges, continue to make it difficult to do meaningful medium-term planning.
- Reserves will be exhausted over the next 1-2 years as we must invest in our operational training centres and a new 999 mobilising system.
- Significant deficits are forecast which will be addressed via the Resourcing and Savings Programme.
- Further cuts to frontline services are now underway to deliver financial sustainability.
- Local council tax flexibility remains a key issue.