



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE**

Item 26/24 Appendix D

Fire Station Review

Appendix D: Corporate Staffing Levels

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Corporate Staffing Levels

In the course of consultation, the level of corporate and support staffing within Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (DWFRS) has been raised by stakeholders, particularly representative bodies, as an area that should be considered for reduction before changes impacting frontline operational provision are progressed.

In response, this appendix provides a standardised comparison of operational and corporate staffing across a range of comparable Fire and Rescue Services to support an evidence-based understanding of the Service's relative position.

Operational & Corporate Staffing

To ensure comparability all services, within this appendix, have been normalised using the definitions noted below in Table 1.

Measure	Definition
Operational FTE	Wholetime firefighters + on-call firefighters (FTE) + fire control staff
Corporate / Support FTE	Non-operational support functions (HR, Finance, ICT, Estates, Governance, etc.)
Operational: Corporate Ratio	Operational FTE ÷ Corporate FTE
Net Revenue Budget	Latest approved net revenue budget requirement (2026/27)

Table 1: Definition notes

Comparisons

Comparator services have been included based on rural or mixed-rural characteristics, population dispersion, station footprint, and operating model similar to the DWFRS. Additional services have also been included to strengthen peer comparison, where appropriate. A small number of metropolitan or structurally different services are included for context only.

Understanding the governance model of a Fire and Rescue Service is an important part of workforce benchmarking because governance arrangements directly influence how corporate and support functions are structured, funded and delivered. Services operating as standalone Combined Fire Authorities, such as our Service, are typically required to maintain a broad range of internal corporate capability to discharge statutory responsibilities relating to governance, finance, legal compliance, democratic accountability, people services, assurance, information governance, procurement, estates and organisational support.

By contrast, services operating within county council structures, mayoral arrangements or shared-service models often access elements of this capability through wider corporate systems, centralised support teams or jointly provided services. As a result, reported corporate staffing levels may appear lower in some services, not necessarily because less support is required, but because functions are organised or accounted for differently. Understanding these governance differences is therefore essential to ensuring workforce comparisons are interpreted fairly and in context.

Comparisons are most meaningful where services share similar operating environments, governance structures and staffing models. A lower reported support staffing figure elsewhere does not necessarily mean lower organisational support provision overall.

Apparent differences in operational-to-corporate ratios do not automatically indicate greater organisational efficiency and may instead reflect governance or accounting arrangements. Therefore, wider considerations of a services efficiency are important.

Table 2, below, provides a clear position against nine other Fire and Rescue Services.

Service	Category	Governance Model	Operational FTE	Corporate FTE	Op: Corp Ratio	Net Revenue Budget
DWFRS	Baseline	Combined Fire Authority	842	303	2.78: 1	£79.503m (2026-2027)
Devon & Somerset	Closest peer	Combined Fire Authority	1,152	334	3.45: 1	£109,290,200 (2026-2027)
Hampshire & Isle of Wight	Close peer	Combined Fire Authority	1,165	371	3.14:1	£109.5m (2026-2027)
Hereford & Worcester	Close peer	Combined Fire Authority	483	123	3.93: 1	£46.29m (2026-2027)
Lincolnshire	Close peer	County Council Fire Service	513	93	5.52: 1	£32.214m (2026-2027)
Warwickshire	Close peer	County Council Fire Service	305	73	4.18: 1	£27.769m (2026-2027)
Cheshire	Secondary	Combined Fire Authority	576	188	3.06: 1	£61.7m (2026-2027)
Staffordshire	Secondary	PFCC governance	478	152	3.14: 1	£57.348m (2026-2027)
Kent	Context	Combined Fire Authority	870	377	2.31: 1	£102.717m (2026-2027)
London Fire Brigade	Context only	Mayoral / Greater London Authority model	4,797	1,028	4.67: 1	£574.4m (2026-2027)

Table 2: Note: Operational Full Time Equivalent (FTE) include wholetime, on-call and control. (FTE figures taken from Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government – Fire and rescue workforce and pension statistics England, year ending March 2025)

The table suggests that DWFRS is in a comparatively positive position and does not indicate an excessive level of corporate staffing when viewed in the context of comparable services, governance arrangements and organisational complexity.

DWFRS's operational to corporate ratio of 2.78:1 sits comfortably within the range of comparable fire and rescue services and is closely aligned with Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (DSFRS) who are a highly comparable standalone Combined Fire Authority. DSFRS has a large geographic footprint and significant rurality, records a ratio of 3.45:1.

Furthermore Hampshire & Isle of Wight (HIFRS), with a mixed rural and urban footprint, records a comparable ratio of 3.14:1. However, HIFRS through their Shared Services Partnership, with Hampshire County Council and Hampshire Constabulary, are supported by outsourced functions, these include procurement, finance and non-operational recruitment.

The comparison between Kent Fire and Rescue Service and DWFRS, both as Combined Fire Authorities, provide a lower operational to corporate ratio in Kent (2.31:1) compared with DWFRS (2.78:1). However, the difference is best understood in the context of organisational design rather than as a direct indicator of relative efficiency. Kent operates with a smaller land area than DWFRS, however it has a higher population and is more urbanised. DWFRS, by contrast, operates as a more rural and geographically dispersed service, maintaining a corporate establishment to support a wider rural footprint. As a result, the variation in ratios reflects

differences in service configuration, scale and demand profile, rather than a straightforward comparison of efficiency.

Additionally, governance arrangements matter. Many services showing higher operational-to-corporate ratios, for example county council fire services or mayoral governance models, who operate within a wider local authority or shared corporate structures. Furthermore, Staffordshire, who are governed by a Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner outsource Procurement, HR/People Services, Finance, Legal Services, Facilities Management, Communications & Press, and Occupational Health.

While DWFRS and Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service share a similar governance model as Combined Fire Authorities, differences in how corporate services are delivered are important when interpreting workforce ratios. DWFRS maintains corporate functions directly to support statutory responsibilities, governance, organisational assurance and service delivery. By comparison, Cheshire delivers a number of functions through outsourced arrangements, including recruitment, HR and organisational development, which may reduce the level of corporate staffing reported within its directly employed workforce. Consequently, while Cheshire reports a higher operational-to-corporate staffing ratio than DWFRS, this should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of greater efficiency or lower organisational overhead, as staffing figures alone do not capture differences in delivery models, outsourced provision or wider organisational support capacity.

This highlights that workforce ratios should be interpreted alongside organisational performance and efficiency evidence. A lower ratio might reasonably raise questions if accompanied by weak financial control, poor inspection outcomes or governance concerns.

Efficiency

It is important that workforce benchmarking is considered within a broader assessment of organisational efficiency rather than relying solely on operational-to-corporate staffing ratios. While such ratios can provide a useful high-level indicator, they do not in themselves demonstrate whether a Fire and Rescue Service is operating efficiently, effectively or sustainably. A balanced assessment should also consider financial performance, service outcomes, inspection findings, productivity, resilience, statutory capacity and wider organisational assurance.

Within DWFRS, this wider context provides important evidence of organisational effectiveness. The Service has received independent recognition from HMICFRS for strong performance in efficiency, including a minimum of a “Good” judgment in the past three inspection cycles, reflecting positive assessment of how resources are aligned to risk, performance is monitored and value for money achieved.

In addition, internal audit arrangements provide ongoing assurance regarding governance, controls, financial management and organisational effectiveness, while ISO 45001 (occupational health and safety) and ISO 55001 (asset management) accreditations demonstrate externally assessed and structured approaches to workforce safety, asset stewardship, operational resilience and continuous improvement. Taken together, these factors indicate that consideration of efficiency should extend beyond staffing comparisons alone and include the strength of governance, assurance arrangements and evidence of effective resource management.

This broader evidence base suggests the Service’s staffing model is supporting organisational effectiveness rather than indicating unnecessary corporate capacity.

Taken together, the table indicates that DWFRS is operating within a reasonable staffing range for a standalone, rural Combined Fire Authority, and does not provide evidence that the Service carries an unusually high or disproportionate level of corporate staffing when compared appropriately.

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