



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE**

Draft Minutes of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority meeting held at 10:00 hours on 30 June 2026 at Salisbury City Hall, Malthouse Lane, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP2 7TU.

These are draft minutes prepared by Officers in conjunction with the Chair and Vice Chair to be approved by the Fire and Rescue Authority at its next meeting.

Members present:

Cllr Clare Weight (Chair)	Cllr Paul Oatway (Vice Chair)	Cllr Boaz Barry
Cllr Laura Beddow	Cllr Richard Biggs	Cllr Matt Bragg
Cllr Olivia Brown	Cllr Matthew Courtliff ²	Cllr Brian Dalton
Cllr Andrew Davis	Cllr Michelle Dower	Cllr Paul Hilliard
Cllr Peter Miles ¹	Cllr Mike Parkes	Cllr Paul Sample
Cllr Gordon Slade	Cllr Kevin Small	Cllr Duncan Sowry - House

¹Cllr Miles left the meeting following the conclusion of item 26/24 (Station Reviews – Outcomes)

²Cllr Courtliff left the meeting during item 26/27 (Service Annual Performance Review 2025-26)

Officer attendance:

Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Andy Cole
 Assistant Chief Officer (ACO), Director of Financial Services & Treasurer, Ryan Maslen
 Assistant Chief Officer (ACO), Director of Corporate Services and Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority, Vikki Shearing
 Monitoring Officer, Lisa Kirkman
 Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) - Director of Response, Darren Langdown
 Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) - Director of Safety and Compliance, Dave Waters
 Assistant Chief Officer (ACO), Director of People Services, Jenny Long
 Assistant Chief Officer (ACO), Director of Service Support, Jill McCrae
 Area Manager (AM), Service Improvement and Resilience, Jason Moncrieff
 Group Manager (GM), Service Improvement and Resilience, Greg Izon
 Democratic Services Manager, David Shaw
 Democratic Services Manager, Alex Cooper

26/20 Welcome

26/20.1 Assistant Chief Officer (ACO), Director of Corporate Services and Clerk, Vikki Shearing opened the annual meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority and welcomed Members, including new Members Cllr Gordon Slade and Cllr Mike Parkes.

26/21 Apologies

26/21.1 No apologies were received.

26/22 Election of Chair

26/22.1 ACO Shearing sought nominations for the role of Chair of the Authority for 2026-27. Cllr Clare Weight was nominated by Cllr Paul Sample. This nomination was seconded by Cllr Andrew Davis. There were no further nominations for Chair. Following a vote, Cllr Clare Weight was duly elected.

26/22.2 RESOLVED: That Cllr Clare Weight be elected as Chair of the Authority for the year 2026-27.

26/23 Election of Vice Chair

26/23.1 The Chair sought nominations for the role of Vice Chair of the Authority for 2026-27. Cllr Paul Oatway was nominated by Cllr Kevin Small. This nomination was seconded by Cllr Andrew Davis. There were no further nominations for Vice Chair. Following a vote, Cllr Paul Oatway was duly elected.

26/23.2 RESOLVED: That Cllr Paul Oatway be elected as Vice Chair of the Authority for the year 2026-27.

26/24 Code of Conduct, Declarations of Interests

26/24.1 The Chair asked the meeting for any disclosures of pecuniary interests under the Localism Act. There were no disclosures.

26/25 Review minutes of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority meeting on 10 February 2026 and any matters arising

26/25.1 The Chair asked Members to review and approve the minutes from the meeting of 10 February 2026.

26/25.2 RESOLVED: That the minutes of the 10 February 2026 meeting be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

26/26 Review minutes of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority meeting on 31 March 2026 and any matters arising

- 26/26.1 The Chair asked Members to review and approve the minutes from the meeting of 31 March 2026.
- 26/26.2 RESOLVED: That the minutes of the 31 March 2026 meeting be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.**
- 26/27 Receive the approved minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee meeting on 3 December 2025 and a verbal update on the Finance and Audit Committee meeting held on 24 February 2026**
- 26/27.1 Cllr Kevin Small, Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee, presented the minutes of the meeting of 3 December 2025 and provided a verbal update on the Finance & Audit Committee meeting held on 24 February 2026.
- 26/27.2 RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee meeting held on 3 December 2025 be received and the verbal update on the meeting held on 24 February 2026 be noted.**
- 26/28 Public questions**
- 26/28.1 The meeting noted public questions regarding agenda item 26/29 – Station Reviews. Details of the questions submitted, and the responses are contained in the appendix attached to the minutes (minute 26/36 post refers).
- 26/29 Station Reviews**
- 26/29.1 The Members' Working Group Chair, Cllr Small, provided a summary of the work of the Members' Working Group since its inception and an overview of the events that had taken place following the Fire Authority meeting held on 10 February 2026. Cllr Small commended the public consultation process that had been undertaken around the station reviews and praised the wide array of public engagement that had taken place. Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) Jill McCrae provided information about the purpose of the presentation that was to be delivered regarding outcomes of the station review work.
- 26/29.2 Assistant Chief Officer (ACO), Director of Financial Services & Treasurer, Ryan Maslen, provided an outline of the current financial position and political engagement that officers had undertaken in order to raise awareness of the financial challenges facing the Service, which had included further engagement with local MPs, the Interim Head of Fire Funding at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), and the Minister with responsibility for Fire Services. The MHCLG Fire Funding team had confirmed that they would support an application by the Service for precept flexibility in 2027/28, subject to the Service demonstrating the progression of a Modernisation Programme. MHCLG had confirmed that they would not support an application for precept flexibility solely to allow the Service to defer difficult decisions. ACO Maslen explained that engagement with MHCLG would continue and that a meeting with the Fire Minister had been requested. The Service's application for precept flexibility would be prepared during Autumn

2026, aligned to MHCLG's timescales, and confirmation of the financial position for 2027/28 would be received in February 2027. ACO Maslen provided an update on the Service's application for £1.8m in grant funding linked to data transformation work, which had been awarded. ACO Maslen reminded Members that this funding, whilst welcome, could only be used to address the budget deficit in the 2026/27 year and would not resolve the Service's long-term financial sustainability challenges.

- 26/29.3 The Service's medium-term financial position remained the same as it had in February 2026, with an ongoing budget deficit over the medium-term. ACO Maslen reminded Members that the Fire Authority was required by law to set a balanced revenue budget each year. The financial position of the Service within the current year was subject to change due to ongoing inflationary pressures and the cost of pay awards and pension costs. MHCLG were commencing a review of the underlying fire funding formula, but this would not have a practical effect on the Service's finances for several years.
- 26/29.4 ACO Maslen provided a detailed overview of the Service's current Band D precept, which is £96.95 for 2026/27, and the implications of a potential uplift in precept if flexibility were to be granted. The national average fire precept for a Band D property is £100.72 in 2026/27. If the Service were to be granted additional precept flexibility of £3.77 for 2027/28, this would enable the Fire Authority to approve a Band D precept aligned to the national average in 2027/28 of £105.72, which included an assumption that the Fire Authority would also approve the standard maximum yearly uplift of £5 at the same time. The practical impact of this increase in precept for council tax payers would be an additional 17 pence per week tax burden. This uplift in precept would bring the Service into line with the national average during 2027/28 and would generate an estimated £2.25m of income per year. ACO Maslen again reminded Members that the Service and the Fire Authority must clearly commit to a programme of modernisation in order to have a chance to be successful in applying for precept flexibility.
- 26/29.5 ACO McCrae drew Members' attention to the successes of the Resourcing and Saving Programme undertaken by the Service. Highlighting that over the 10 years since combination, savings and efficiencies had continually been realised with £6.75m of savings delivered in the past four years, along with targeted investment more recently being made in operational resources where needed. The savings since combination include £2.3m across corporate teams, £576k in senior management, and £1.2m in contractual savings, amongst others. ACO McCrae outlined the independent assurance regimes to which the Service was subject and explained the outcomes of these audits, which had delivered consistently positive outcomes for the Service and substantial assurance from auditors.
- 26/29.6 ACO McCrae introduced the station reviews project and outlined the key dates and milestones in this process to that point. ACO Shearing provided Members with an overview of the public consultation process, which had run for 13 weeks from 13 February to 15 May 2026. The public consultation process on the

station reviews project had been conducted independently by the Premier Advisory Group (PAG) and had complied with the Gunning Principles. The consultation processes had seen 6,188 people respond to the survey and 1,213 attend public consultation meetings. Across all station areas, the majority of responses had come from older age groups, female populations made up the majority of respondents, and 91.1% of respondents were local residents. ACO Shearing addressed an issue in the consultation process in which one of the questions was missing on some of the printed copies of the survey. Mitigations were successfully put in place by PAG, following assurance from outside Counsel that those mitigations were appropriate and proportional, and it was deemed reasonable by the Authority's Monitoring Officer that the consultation process should continue.

- 26/29.7 In terms of outcomes, ACO Shearing explained that 85.5% of respondents had opposed the proposals set out in the consultation survey. The primary issues raised by respondents were community safety and community response. The majority of respondents agreed that they would support an increase in council tax to support the financial position of the Service. The predominant themes proposed as alternatives to the station review proposals were: financial, to make cuts in other areas and seek additional government funding in order to safeguard stations; a rejection of the proposals, with requests to re-review the data relating to response times and risk; and operational, to improve on-call recruitment and retention, to change crewing models and to replace equipment or co-locate resources to make the Service more efficient.
- 26/29.8 ACO McCrae set out the data assurance that the Service had attained in respect of the station reviews project. An independent organisation had undertaken a comprehensive review of the analytical methodology employed in the station reviews project and had provided external scrutiny of the assumptions and use of data that underpinned the recommendations of the station reviews work. The independent review provided assurance that the methodology, analytical approach, and supporting data used to inform the station reviews project had been robust and of suitable integrity.
- 26/29.9 ACO McCrae addressed the theme of the ratio of corporate and support to operational staff that had arisen during the consultation. ACO McCrae explained that the Service was in a positive position when compared to peer authorities in terms of the ratio of corporate and support to operational staff. However, this ratio could not provide a true like for like comparison because some authorities outsource corporate and support functions, meaning those roles were not reflected in staffing figures. Differences in governance models also had to be taken into account.
- 26/29.10 ACO McCrae introduced the team that had completed the station reviews work. The team had comprised of an operational Area Manager, operational Group Manager, three operational Station Managers, and two corporate staff with experience in data analysis and project coordination.

- 26/29.11 Group Manager (GM), Service Improvement and Resilience, Greg Izon, began the station reviews presentation by providing Members with an overview of the rurality of the Service area and the statistics relating to the elderly population. GM Izon made reference to Appendix F, which set out the level of risk expected with any proposal for development in any of the relevant local authority's local plans and housing allocations. Area Manager (AM), Service Improvement and Resilience, Jason Moncrieff, and GM Izon presented the incident data used in the station reviews project, set out in Appendix J, the response times data, Appendix M, the seasonal variations response time data, set out in Appendix E, the wildfire analysis, Appendix G, the flooding and thatch analysis, Appendices H & I, the availability analysis, Appendix K, the impact on fire cover analysis, Appendix L, the scale of incidents analysis, Appendix N, and the availability modelling by staffing levels, which was set out in Appendix O.
- 26/29.12 ACO Maslen provided an overview of the estimated annual capital budget savings, revenue budget savings and one-off redundancy costs if the closure of all eight stations under review were to be approved. AM Moncrieff and GM Izon presented Appendix P, which set out in Annexes 1 to 8 the impact assessments for each of the stations under review.
- 26/29.13 ACO McCrae made reference to Appendix C, the Modernisation Programme 2026-29. The team responsible for the station reviews and the current Resource & Savings programmes would transition to deliver a Modernisation Programme that would support the Service's application for precept flexibility with MHCLG, and deliver a modern, resilient Service that was designed for the future and was capable of responding to evolving community needs, financial pressures, and risks.
- 26/29.14 Cllr Small presented the recommendations of the Members' Working Group, which had been formulated in light of the Service's current financial position, the uncertainty surrounding additional funding being realised in the form of precept flexibility, and the absolute requirement that a Modernisation Programme be delivered in order for precept flexibility to be considered by MHCLG. Cllr Small asked Members to acknowledge that the £1.8m in funding that had been secured by the Service for use in 2026/27 would only provide short-term financial ease and would not be awarded again. Cllr Small submitted that Members were in possession of all of the data that was required to make a fully informed decision, and that to defer a decision was to place greater financial pressure on the Service at a later date. Cllr Small formally moved the recommendations set out in the report. Cllr Paul Oatway seconded the proposal.
- 26/29.15 Cllr Mike Parkes opposed any decision that may automatically lead to station closures. Cllr Parkes raised concerns about the deliverability of the proposed Modernisation Programme and suggested that reform of the underlying fire funding formula should be the focus of efforts to address the Service's financial challenges. Cllr Parkes proposed, and Cllr Peter Miles seconded, an amendment to the recommendations in the report, such that point 3) be altered to read:

“Should one or more of these conditions not be met, the Chief Fire Officer shall bring a further report to the Fire Authority setting out the financial, operational and community implications, together with available options. No decision regarding the closure of any fire station shall be taken without a further resolution of the Fire Authority.”

- 26/29.16 Cllrs Michelle Dower, Boaz Barry and Laura Beddow spoke in favour of the amendment introduced by Cllrs Parkes and Miles, adding that to make a decision at the meeting based on the future financial position of the Service may not be prudent. Cllr Paul Sample asked that Members note the current uncertainty surrounding the Prime Minister, and the consequent status of all Government Ministers, and suggested that to make a decision that may lead to station closures at the present moment would fail to account for the possibility of any promises made by those Ministers or their officials changing in due course.
- 26/29.17 ACO Maslen responded to a question from Cllr Paul Hilliard about the potential impact of the amendment on the timeline that would need to be followed in order to apply for and secure precept flexibility. ACO Maslen advised that an application would have to be made by November 2026, citing the financial challenges faced by the Service. ACO Maslen explained that it was civil servants within MHCLG who had predominantly offered their support for an application by the Service for precept flexibility thus far, meaning that support from within the department was likely to withstand changes in the political leadership. ACO Maslen informed Members that a consultation process would be undertaken, as it was every year, on the local government finance settlement, and that a provisional settlement that may indicate whether an application for precept flexibility would be successful would be received in the week before Christmas 2026.
- 26/29.18 The Chair put to the vote the amendment from Cllrs Parkes and Miles regarding point 3) of the recommendations. With a majority of Members opposed to the amendment, the vote was lost. The Chair asked Members to again consider the substantive proposal from Cllrs Small and Oatway, which was to approve the recommendations set out in the report.
- 26/29.19 Cllr Sample proposed, and Cllr Duncan Sowry-House seconded, an amendment to the recommendations in the report such that point 2) be altered to read:
- “2) Agree to the implementation of the Service’s Modernisation Programme to be monitored & scrutinised by the Finance & Audit Committee.”
- 26/29.20 Cllr Sowry-House spoke in support of the amendment and suggested that it would bolster the scrutiny and oversight of the decision making surrounding the Modernisation Programme. Members discussed the importance of them being sighted on the development and delivery of the Modernisation Programme and it was agreed that all Members were to be sent the Finance & Audit Committee papers via email ahead of each meeting. The Chair put to the vote the amendment from Cllrs Sample and Sowry-House regarding point 2). With a majority of Members in favour of the amendment, the vote was carried. The

Chair asked Members to consider the now amended substantive proposal from Cllrs Small and Oatway.

26/29.21 Cllr Richard Biggs raised concern about the assumption that all Dorset and Wiltshire residents would be supportive of an uplift in precept beyond the usual maximum of £5.00, given the cost-of-living pressures to which most people were subject. Cllr Biggs asked that Members continue to seek reform to the current council tax system. Cllr Andrew Davis noted that without the £1.8m in grant funding secured for 2026/27, consideration of potential station closures would have been considered at the meeting, with no opportunity for deferral.

26/29.22 Cllr Matt Bragg proposed, and Cllr Small seconded, an amendment to the recommendations in the report such that an additional point 4) be added and that it should read:

“Ask the CFO, Strategic Leadership Team and MPs in the Fire Authority area to continue to lobby and pressure the fire minister and MHCLG to recognise our financial problems and take the necessary steps to remedy.”

26/29.23 Cllr Sample advised that Wiltshire Council had resolved to request that its Leader write to the Fire Minister and MPs in support of addressing the problems presented by the fire funding formula and suggested that Cllr Bragg’s proposed amendment effectively mirrored and supported this aim. The Chair put to the vote the amendment from Cllrs Bragg and Small regarding the additional point 4). With all Members in favour of the amendment, the vote was carried. The Chair asked Members to consider the now amended substantive proposal from Cllrs Small and Oatway.

26/29.24 Cllr Oatway, as the original seconder of the recommendations, spoke in support of station reviews work, and thanked the Resourcing and Savings Programme team for their work. Cllr Oatway thanked ACO Maslen for the efforts that had been made in lobbying Government about the financial pressures faced by the Service. Cllr Oatway reminded Members of the Service’s track record in delivering modernisation and in adapting to unprecedented circumstances. Cllr Small stated that Members had the information that was needed to make a fully informed decision and thanked all Officers and Members involved in the station reviews and consultation processes.

26/29.25 Lisa Kirkman, Monitoring Officer, confirmed the wording of the amended recommendations that were to be voted on by Members as part of the substantive proposal. The Chair put to the vote the amended recommendations. With a majority of Members in favour, the vote was carried.

26/29.26 **RESOLVED: That the Authority -**

1) Agree that all 8 fire stations, namely, Bradford on Avon, Cranborne, Charmouth, Hamworthy, Maiden Newton, Mere, Ramsbury and Wilton fire stations remain open;

- 2) Agree to the implementation of the Service's Modernisation Programme to be monitored & scrutinised by the Finance & Audit Committee.**

Subject to;

- a) The Authority being granted flexibility to raise council tax precept to at least the national average for fire services for 2027-28,**
 - b) The subsequent approval of the council tax precept rise by the Authority at its meeting in February 2027; and**
 - c) There are no other and further significant reductions in funding;**
- 3) Should all of these conditions, in a), b) and c) above not be met, confirmation of which will be clear in budget setting papers presented to the Authority in February 2027, the Authority agree that all eight fire stations, namely, Bradford on Avon, Cranborne, Charmouth, Hamworthy, Maiden Newton, Mere, Ramsbury and Wilton will be closed.**
- 4) Ask the CFO, Strategic Leadership Team and MPs in the Fire Authority area to continue to lobby and pressure the fire minister and MHCLG to recognise our financial problems and take the necessary steps to remedy.**

26/30 Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority Appointments 2026-27

26/30.1 ACO Shearing introduced the report and reminded Members that appointments were based upon the political proportionality of Members on the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority. The party groups comprised of eight Liberal Democrats Alliance, five Conservatives, two Reform UK and one Labour. There were two ungrouped Members.

26/30.2 Members from the Liberal Democrat Alliance Group to be appointed to the Finance & Audit Committee were:

Cllr Clare Weight
Cllr Duncan Sowry-House
Cllr Matt Bragg
Cllr Paul Hilliard

26/30.3 Members from the Conservative Group to be appointed to the Finance & Audit Committee were:

Cllr Paul Oatway
Cllr Mike Parkes

26/30.4 Members from the Reform UK Group to be appointed to the Finance & Audit Committee were:

Cllr Gordon Slade

- 26/30.5 Following the gift of one position on the Finance & Audit Committee to the Labour Group from the Liberal Democrat Alliance Group, Members from the Labour Group to be appointed to the Finance & Audit Committee were:
- Cllr Kevin Small
- 26/30.6 ACO Shearing consulted with Members and confirmed the following appointments to further committees, groups and additional bodies:
- 26/30.7 **Local Pension Board**
Cllr Richard Biggs and Cllr Paul Hilliard were unanimously appointed to the Local Pension Board for the 2026-27 year, and Cllr Clare Weight was unanimously appointed as a substitute member.
- 26/30.8 **Local Government Association (LGA)**
Cllr Clare Weight, Cllr Paul Oatway and Cllr Paul Hilliard were unanimously appointed to the Local Government Association.
- 26/30.9 **LGA Fire Commission**
Cllr Clare Weight and Cllr Paul Oatway were unanimously appointed to the LGA Fire Commission and Cllr Kevin Small was unanimously appointed as a substitute.
- 26/30.10 **South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) Board**
Cllr Kevin Small was unanimously appointed to the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) Board.
- 26/30.11 **South West Councils**
Cllr Clare Weight was unanimously appointed to South West Councils.
- 26/30.12 **South West Councils Employers' Panel**
Cllr Clare Weight was unanimously appointed to South West Councils Employers' Panel.
- 26/30.13 **Wiltshire Public Service Board**
Cllr Paul Oatway was unanimously appointed to the Wiltshire Public Service Board and Cllr Clare Weight was unanimously appointed as a substitute.
- 26/30.14 Constituent Authority **Community Safety Partnership** appointees were unanimously agreed as follows:
- Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) – Cllr Clare Weight
Dorset – Cllr Laura Beddow
Swindon – Cllr Gordon Slade
Wiltshire – Cllr Brian Dalton

- 26/30.15 It was noted that Local Performance and Scrutiny Committee Chairs would be appointed at each of the respective first meetings of those Committees for the 2026-27 year, which would be held in August 2026.
- 26/30.16 RESOLVED: Eight Members were appointed to the Finance and Audit Committee for the 2026-27 year.**
- 26/30.17 RESOLVED: Members elected Cllr Kevin Small as the Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee, Cllr Paul Hilliard as the Vice Chair.**
- 26/30.18 RESOLVED: Members made appointments to the Local Pensions Board, the Local Government Association (LGA), the LGA Fire Commission, South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) Board, South West Councils, South West Councils Employers' Panel, Wiltshire Public Service Board and the four constituent authority Community Safety Partnerships.**
- 26/31 Treasury Management Annual Report for 2025/26**
- 26/31.1 ACO Maslen presented the report, which considered the final treasury management performance during the 2025-26 year. The report also provided Members with an updated position, following the six-monthly report update presented in December 2025.
- 26/31.2 Cllr Small asked that Members recognise the need for borrowing by the Service in the future, noting that earmarked reserves that had been on hand prior to 2026/27 were earmarked for the new training centre at Weymouth and that expenditure of these funds for that purpose was now underway. Cllr Small suggested that Members recognise that a cost pressure would be created though the expenditure of the funds allocated to the training centre projects, by virtue of the fact that interest returns on that money would fall away. Cllr Small praised Officers for ensuring that the total interest earned by the Service was greater than the interest paid on historical debt.
- 26/31.3 RESOLVED: That the content of the report be noted.**
- 26/32 Service Annual Performance Review 2025-26 – Presentation**
- 26/32.1 ACO McCrae introduced the presentation and provided narrative and context to the performance slides.
- 26/32.2 ACO McCrae gave an overview of the previous year, referenced the five priorities of the Service, and explained how these aligned to the Local Performance and Scrutiny Committees and the Finance & Audit Committee.
- 26/32.3 Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) David Waters made reference to Priority 1 – Making safer and healthier choices. Points highlighted included that 49,336 children had received safety education from the Service across 812 separate opportunities of engagement with children. A Pro Active Community Targeting (PACT) initiative was underway to support 'lone males', following five fire

fatalities who were male. Crews had visited 77 venues across the Service area, including Men's Sheds and pubs, to share information regarding this initiative. Weymouth crews had also left 20 boat safety packs with Weymouth Marina for boating community occupiers. There had been 850 safeguarding referrals in the year, which represented a 22.3% increase.

- 26/32.4 Regarding home fire safety, 7,064 home fire safety visits had been undertaken, with 7076 referrals from partner organisations. Of the fires now attended by the Service, 70.6% now were at premises with smoke alarms. Of the premises attended as part of a home fire safety visit, 523 resulted in the provision of specialist equipment for those hard of hearing or deaf, 158 resulted in fire retardant resources having been provided to reduce the risk posed by smoking within the home, 39 winter warmth packs had been provided, and two boat packs had been issued. The Service continued to utilise Nextdoor.com as a platform to engage on a local level and to issue safety messages and advice. The Service's Nextdoor.com community had 257,668 members. In terms of accidental dwelling fires, there had been a 19.7% increase compared with the five-year average. Of those fires, 91.4% were confined to the room of origin. There had been a slight rise in deliberate fires of 4.4% when compared with the five-year average. There had been two confirmed fire deaths to date, with four more deaths at fire related incidents awaiting the coroner's verdict.
- 26/32.5 Regarding road safety, the long-term trend was downwards for road traffic collisions in which people were killed or seriously injured, with 506 such incidents in the year. Road safety prevention work continued to be delivered, with 89 Go Drive events reaching 6,404 students at 71 different schools. One Biker Down session had been held. Road safety prevention work continued to strategically align with national road safety campaigns and initiatives.
- 26/32.6 Cllr Laura Beddow praised the work of the Service in having attended the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Day event in Dorchester, and provided fire safety advice and support to those communities.
- 26/32.7 In reply to a question from Cllr Davis, ACFO Waters explained that the information package provided as part of the Go Drive events covered the use of a number of vehicle types, not just to cars.
- 26/32.8 Cllr Richard Biggs enquired as to the way that the Service compared nationally in terms of the number of accidental dwelling fire incidents. ACFO Waters responded that the Service matched the prevention campaigns run nationally by the National Fire Chiefs Council and was seeing via its own investigatory work that the prevention information being issued was appropriate. ACFO Waters explained that to reduce and prevent accidental dwelling fires was largely a factor of the amount of education that could be delivered on the topic but acknowledged that the trend was a challenging one to manage as a result of the myriad factors that contribute to accidental dwelling fires.
- 26/32.9 In response to a question from Cllr Matthew Courtliff regarding the fire safety risk posed by hoarding behaviour and the work done with local authorities to

counteract this, ACFO Waters confirmed that a significant amount of work was undertaken alongside local councils and other external partners such as water and electricity boards to identify and deliver priority attendance to vulnerable people, including hoarders. The Service's prevention staff had received training on the effects of hoarding and hoarding behaviours from experts on the matter.

- 26/32.10 In reply to a question from Cllr Davis regarding the boat safety packs that could be supplied by the Service, and for whom they were primarily intended, Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Andy Cole replied that the packs were intended primarily for canal and house boat occupants and that separate initiatives, such as in Weymouth, had focused on sea-going vessels.
- 26/32.11 Reference was made to priority 2 – protecting you and the built environment from harm. Changes to fire safety legislation and the work of the fire safety department were highlighted. There had been a 1% reduction against the 5-year average for the number of unwanted automatic fire alarms attended, with 4,896 incidents attended against a target of 4,933. The Service had completed 1,845 building regulations consultations, 563 licensing consultations, and 743 Fire Safety Audits. Fire safety enforcement work was being strengthened; 21 enforcement notices had been served, and 26 prohibition notices had been served. A fire safety prosecution had successfully been attained in respect of the Portlet Manor Care Home, resulting in a £70,000 fine for the offenders, £22,000 in costs and a £2,000 victim surcharge. Station crews had undertaken 692 business fire safety checks, with 49 referrals resulting in follow up action. This work has enabled fire safety specialists to focus on higher-risk, more complex cases.
- 26/32.12 Cllr Dower enquired as to whether the Service was able to charge for the business fire safety checks that it carried out. ACFO Waters responded that the Service was duty-bound to educate premises on their fire safety responsibilities and could, therefore, not charge for undertaking these checks. Additionally, CFO Cole replied that the Service had a legal duty to educate residents and businesses, and that business fire safety checks provided proactive work for operational crews to undertake when on duty. Cllr Dower raised a further query about the penalty that was incurred by commercial premises in the event that repeated false fire alarms actuations occurred at that site. ACFO Waters explained that there was no charge currently, but that officers did offer education and verbal challenge in these instances. CFO Cole responded that false fire alarm actuations provide a degree of insight into potential fire safety issues at a premises that may be leading to the false actuation, and which may need to be resolved.
- 26/32.13 Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) Darren Langdown made reference to priority 3 – being where you need us. Details were provided on Service response times and the number of incidents/fires/non-fire related incidents attended. The average attendance time of a first appliance at a premises with sleeping risk was 10 minutes and 10 seconds, against the target of 10 minutes. The average attendance time of a first appliance at a Road Traffic Collision (RTC) was 12 minutes and 32 seconds, against a target of 15 minutes. The number of RTC

incidents attended had been 695, with 466 people rescued from RTCs in the year. Reference was made to the availability of on-call appliances through the year, the challenges that continued to be presented by the on-call duty system, and the efforts that had been made to improve the recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters. An update was provided on the significant work that had been undertaken to improve multi-agency working by the Service, and it was noted that 19 multi-agency exercise had been undertaken, two national resilience exercises, 45 cross-border exercises, and 42 exercises had been organised by stations. The Service had continued to respond to a diverse array of major incident types, including wildfires, public disorder, working with Border Force, counter terrorism work, and gas leaks.

- 26/32.14 In response to a question from Cllr Davis regarding when it was known that an on-call firefighter would not be available to attend their station in response to a call to do so, ACFO Langdown explained that management of contracted hours of work sat with Watch Managers, and that this should reflect that firefighter's true availability. It was noted that when a firefighter within the Service was signed up to work, it was extremely rare that they did not turn out. Where this had happened, it was most likely to be the result of a communications failure.
- 26/32.15 It was explained in response to a question from Cllr Small that the costs per firefighter of training and breathing apparatus were factored into future financial planning.
- 26/32.16 In response to a question from Cllr Sample regarding the aspect of the Service's work that provided the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) the greatest cause for concern, CFO Cole explained that keeping staff safe and making adequate provision for them was the first concern of the SLT.
- 26/32.17 CFO Cole explained in response to a question from the Chair that employers could view the Service's guide to hiring on-call firefighters in order to better understand the benefits of hiring people who are also employed as on-call firefighters.
- 26/32.18 ACO McCrae, ACO Shearing, ACO Maslen and ACFO Waters made reference to priority 4 – making every penny count. There had been good performance in the various audit and inspection regimes that the Service was subject to. In terms of financial management, it was noted that the Service's reliance on Council tax as its primary funding stream had increased from 63% to 71% since combination in 2016. In the same time period, £15.1m of annual revenue savings had been made to maintain financial sustainability. There had been a 2.4% reduction in direct funding from Central Government during this period. The cost per firefighter per year was £25.03 within the service and £30.80 nationally. The Band D council tax income for the service was £91.95, which was significantly below the national average of £95.56. Information was provided regarding the future financial outlook for the Service and the reserves and general fund balances.

- 26/32.19 The work of the Resourcing and Savings Programme team over the last 12 months was outlined, and the next steps for that team as it transitions to delivering the Service Modernisation Programme from 2026-29 were set out. There had been good overall performance in meeting legal and information governance requirements. The ways in which technology is being utilised to improve Service efficiency were set out, and included the use of artificial intelligence, infrastructure development, and migration from legacy systems. Prevention and learning activities around cyber security continued to be delivered, and it was noted that 3,663 emails had been quarantined, 2,868 security intrusion attacks had been detected, and 23 cyber security incidents had occurred within the year. In terms of fleet and equipment, officers advised that eight new P1 appliances had been procured and delivered, three new command support vehicles had been introduced at Pewsey, Gillingham and Hamworthy, and a Unimog had been delivered at Wareham.
- 26/32.20 The Service was meeting its corporate target to reduce its carbon footprint for utilities, with a reduction in carbon footprint of 9% on electricity and gas consumption. The estates refurbishment programme continued to deliver improvements, namely at Westlea, Calne, Bowerhill Workshops and Gillingham.
- 26/32.21 Regarding health and safety, it was explained that there had been an 18% increase in the number of working days lost through work related injury or ill health. There had been 1,215 working days lost overall, 81% of which could be attributed to 13 individuals.
- 26/32.22 ACO Shearing responded to a question from Cllr Sample regarding how often staff were required to change their passwords, it was explained that the Service had moved away from regular password changes, favouring instead the use of robust passphrases. This reflected national guidance and current best practice.
- 26/32.23 Assistant Chief Officer (ACO), Director of People Services, Jenny Long made reference to priority 5 – supporting and developing our people. The average number of shifts lost to sickness had seen an 8% reduction against the five-year target. The number of working days lost to non-physical sickness was 469, which was mainly contributed to by four individuals on long term sickness absence. There had been an 8.3% increase in the diversity of the workforce, when compared with the five-year average. The ongoing delivery of ED&I training was outlined, and an update was provided on the Service's progress towards the delivery of the culture action plan. Details on discipline, grievance, bullying and harassment investigations were also provided.
- 26/32.24 At the conclusion of the presentation, ACO McCrae provided a summary of the information that had been presented and outlined the key successes and challenges for the Service through the year along with a summary of the position of the corporate targets and the current strategic risks identified as being of the highest risk were highlighted for Members' attention.
- 26/32.25 **RESOLVED: That Members noted the Service annual performance review.**

26/33 Authority Policies Review

26/33.1 ACO McCrae presented the report and advised Members that only minor amendments had been proposed to the Authority policy statements attached in Appendices A-H as part of the biennial review.

26/33.2 RESOLVED: That the proposed policy statements set out in Appendices A-H be approved.

26/34 Service Highlights – Public Video

26/34.1 The Chair asked that a link to the Service Highlights – Public Video was shared with Members for them to view outside of the meeting.

26/34 RESOLVED: That Officers circulate the link to the [Service Highlights - Public Video](#) to Members, which was available to watch on the [Service's YouTube channel](#).

26/35 Date of next meeting

26/35.1 The Chair confirmed the date of the next Authority meeting as 26 September 2026 at 10:00am.

Meeting ended at 16:32 hours.

Signed: _____

Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority – 30 June 2026**26/36 Public Questions****26/36.1 Public Question 1. Nigel Kieser, Station Reviews**

QUESTION: A "Station Optimisation Programme" is outlined in Appendix C as a part of the "Service Modernisation Programme". This Station Optimisation Programme will include consideration of "station mergers, amalgamations, relocation". The Authority is being asked today (30th June) to approve implementation of the Service Modernisation Programme. **Can the Chair please clarify whether this means the CFO would implicitly also be granted permission to proceed with any station mergers, amalgamations or relocation without public consultation?** If so, I wish to challenge this on the basis of paragraph 3.3 of the Member's Handbook, which requires the Authority to "undertake a public consultation on options" where it "contemplates making material changes to prevention, protection and/or response service provision". The most recent public consultation clearly demonstrates that closure of a community's fire station is a material change from their perspective. **Surely Authority members should adopt this same perspective, as they are elected by those same communities?**

RESPONSE provided by Cllr Clare Weight: Thank you for raising this - it's an important point. To be clear, approving the Service Modernisation Programme today would not give automatic permission for any fire station to be merged, relocated or closed. What it does, is set the overall direction and framework for the Service to explore options.

Any specific proposal from within the programme would need to be considered against the Chief Fire Officer's delegated powers. Where a decision falls outside those delegated powers, the proposal would be brought back to Authority Members for consideration and decision, including, as appropriate, public consultation on options. As Members, we fully understand how strongly communities feel about their local fire stations. We would expect to receive the relevant information, including the outcome of any consultation and stakeholder engagement, before making any decision of that scale.

Public Question 2. Julie Doyle, Station Reviews

QUESTION: Fire & RTA risks are increasing and we will need more full & part time staffed stations to deal with the increasing pressures.

Is the authority prepared to accept that a larger ratio of fire fighters to management & admin, than is the case now in Wilts & Dorset, is essential

going forward and that seriously considering outsourcing aspects such as finance is necessary?

Do you accept that addressing these matters may help to avoid costly and deeply unpopular consultations on cutting important rural fire stations and firefighter posts in the future?

REPONSE provided by Cllr Kevin Small: You are right to highlight the importance of having the right balance between frontline firefighters and the support functions that enable them to do their job safely.

The Service has looked carefully at risk and demand across all types of incidents - not just fires and road traffic collisions - and that evidence is what informs how resources are organised.

It's also important to recognise that firefighters rely heavily on support from areas like training, fleet, ICT and prevention work. Without that, response effectiveness and safety would be compromised.

In terms of outsourcing, as outlined in appendix D, this has been considered. At the moment, the view is that outsourcing gives no guarantee of reducing costs and it potentially reduces flexibility, particularly for an emergency service where priorities can change quickly. That said, we should always remain open to reviewing how we deliver services if better value or outcomes can be achieved.

Public Question 3. Andy Corben, Station Reviews

QUESTION: Over the past six months, Fire Brigades Union members in Dorset and Wiltshire have worked tirelessly to highlight the risk of fire station closures and job losses to local communities, councillors, MPs and the fire minister. The chronic under funding of the Fire Service nationally over the last 15 years has been felt more acutely in Dorset & Wiltshire and the FBU welcome the very recent £1.8m grant from government.

Does the Fire Authority agree the highest priority of a Fire & Rescue Service must be operational response, which protects the public and ensures firefighter safety? Securing an increase to the council tax precept is a direct result of all staff, including SLT and the local communities of Dorset & Wiltshire who have lobbied their MP's demanding action to prevent station closures and job losses. The collective efforts from all parties should be recognised and applauded.

The decision taken to vote in favour of raising the precept will provide FBU members some stability at work and protect the communities of Dorset & Wiltshire. However, FBU members have significant safety concerns regarding the Modernisation Programme, specifically reducing the number of firefighters on an appliance. The data provided by the service indicate the demand from incidents require more firefighters, not necessarily more appliances.

To be clear, the FBU position is to 'strive for 5' on a fire engine, endeavour to improve operational response and fight against cuts to the frontline.

If the Fire Authority vote in favour of raising council tax precept, will they ensure the CFO is held accountable to improving response times across Dorset & Wiltshire, improving the health & safety of firefighters and ensure no stations are closed and no jobs are lost?

RESPONSE provided by Cllr Clare Weight: The Authority recognises the contribution of employees, representative bodies, local communities, Members and partners in shaping the future of the Service. The recent one-off government funding and potential precept flexibility provides greater financial stability and supports longer-term planning.

Protecting the public and ensuring firefighter safety remain the Authority's highest priorities. However, effective emergency response relies on more than frontline firefighters alone. Operational crews are supported by a range of functions, all of which are essential to ensuring firefighters are trained, equipped and ready to respond safely and effectively. A recent example would be the purchase of our Unimog, which helps us effectively resolve wildfire incidents with less personnel, effectively placing fewer members of staff at risk.

The Modernisation Programme is therefore focused on ensuring that all resources are used in the most effective way possible. As custodians of public funds, the Authority must consider the whole organisation, aligning investment to risk, demand and the evolving requirements of a modern fire and rescue service to deliver sustainable public safety outcomes.

The best chance of achieving the precept flexibility is by the Authority today endorsing the Members Working Group recommendation. This will give a clear signal to central government that we are committed to a Modernisation Programme for this Service. This commitment will be essential to realise the aims which you've stated and we share.

The rigorous processes in place for Members to scrutinise and monitor performance and standards of the Service will continue; through Local Performance and Scrutiny Committees as well as internal audits that feed into the Finance and Audit Committee.

Public Question 4. Alice Elliott, Station Reviews

QUESTION: Availability was a concern raised throughout your own consultation meetings.

Your Modernisation Programme acknowledges the fragility of the on-call duty system as a core strategic risk, yet the programme doesn't contain a specific on-call objective.

The consultation process has likely damaged recruitment, especially with the conditions being placed in today's vote on station closures early next year.

Nationally on-call firefighters are being targeted and treated as lesser than their wholtime counterparts, which also undoubtedly impacts the morale of our crews.

Given these factors, what specific actions are you taking to address your difficulties with on-call recruitment and retention, what is the timeline for those actions, and how will you ensure they are sufficient to ensure sustainability of the on-call workforce?

RESPONSE provided by Cllr Paul Oatway: The Authority reviews and scrutinises strategic risks on a quarterly basis through the Finance & Audit Committee. Sustainability of the on-call duty system is a strategic risk and the Service's Modernisation Programme will continue the ongoing work with a project focussed on improving our support of the on-call duty system. This is highlighted on Page 6 of appendix C 'Our Modernisation Programme':

"The Service will undertake a comprehensive review of the On-Call firefighter model and supporting fire station arrangements to strengthen recruitment, retention, and availability, ensuring the role remains fit for the evolving demands of modern service delivery. This will include reviewing duty systems, availability standards, contractual arrangements, incentives, training pathways, and community engagement approaches, alongside operational requirements at on-call stations. The review will also consider work-life balance, flexibility, barriers to participation, and opportunities to improve employer engagement and community integration.

For the Service to deliver on its Modernisation Programme, and implement improvements to the on-call, it is essential to secure and implement the precept flexibility described in the recommendation before members today.

Public Question 5. Lesley Elliott, Station Reviews

QUESTION: Question 1: During the public meetings, members of the public were encouraged to submit questions via the online survey, particularly if they didn't feel that they had received a full answer at the meeting. I was one of those that submitted questions. Having read the PAG report and Appendices, I do not see that any of these questions have been answered. **When and how will the questions submitted during the online survey be answered?**

Question 2: One of my questions relates to how the 4 selection criteria were initially applied to all 50 fire stations and how each criteria was weighted to select the final 8 stations. This was not answered clearly through any FOI requests. **When can I see a simple table or document that illustrates how all 4 selection criteria were applied to all 50 fire stations?**

RESPONSE provided by Cllr Clare Weight: Q1. It was important for the Authority that we were able to use the consultation process to provide stakeholders with information about the proposals. It also provided the opportunity to seek the views of stakeholders in relation to alternative proposals and mitigations to the proposals as well as being able to raise any further concerns that they felt were not covered in the information. The public sessions helped us achieve this, as did the consultation survey. We received 6188 survey responses which unfortunately could not be responded to individually. The feedback from the survey and the public sessions has been provided in the

report as themes, not individual questions and the additional appendices in the Station Review report provides responses to these themes.

Q2. I am advised that the table you refer to has been released under the Freedom of Information Act.

Public Question 6. Andy Elliott, Station Reviews

QUESTION: The FA has insisted that it has followed the Gunning Principles throughout the Public Consultation. My concern relates to Principle 2: Sufficient information needs to be supplied for the public to give the consultation 'intelligent consideration'. The PAG report concludes that by producing the leaflets and documents and holding the public meetings, it has met principle 2. However, the report goes on to say "A substantial number noted that confidence would increase if local fire stations were kept open, if the proposals were reconsidered, or had stronger transparency and clearer monitoring." This clearly calls the principle for 'intelligent consideration' into question. Further to this, all 8 reports on the station specific meetings concluded that members of the audience challenged the accuracy, completeness and transparency of the data. There have also been over 50 FOI requests since February that appear to be linked to this proposal, again pointing to the fact that the public could not decipher the official documents. **As the PAG report confirms that the public perception of the data provision was poor, does the Fire Authority believe that the Public Consultation process correctly followed the Gunning Principles and if so, how do you account for the public confusion regarding information?**

Appendix B Data Assurance Report, states several times how impressed it is that DWFRS has published substantial information describing the methodology supporting transparency and helping stakeholders understand how the analysis has been undertaken. I have requested an explanation of this methodology and access to basic data such as the response isochrones numerous times. This has consistently been denied. I have had various verbal explanations, but these have been inconsistent. Cllr Small tried to explain Isochrones several times at public meetings, but was again inconsistent and confused. **Why will DWFRS or the DWFRA not release such simple data?**

RESPONSE provided by Cllr Kevin Small: Q1. We recognise that some members of the public did not feel the information provided during the consultation was as clear or transparent as it could have been, and that is something we take seriously. The consultation report referenced that a significant proportion of respondents to the survey agreed that the information provided was clear as to why the closures were being considered and that the information provided was clear relating to the potential impact of the proposals. Early on in the consultation process, the validity of the data analysis was challenged and we were able to quickly respond to this through an independent assurance of the methodology used (found in appendix B).

Members have also been assured through Premier Advisory Group and the Authority's Monitoring Officer, that the approach for this public consultation met the requirements of the Gunning Principles, specifically principle 2 regarding transparency.

We accept that public understanding and confidence are important and during the consultation period any requests for information were responded to, to support members of the public with their understanding. In addition, 25 public meetings were held where information was presented and there was opportunity for public questions.

Q2. I am aware that there was a request via the Joint Working Group with the FRSA for the incident data used for the analysis, specifically the locations of the incidents. The request was for individual incident addresses which are people's homes and therefore should be treated in a confidential way. This request was therefore refused under FOI exemptions. However following an internal review under the FOI procedure, some information was released at town level. This ensured compliance with data protection responsibilities, protecting the release of personal identifiable information.

Public Question 7. Pauline Church, Station Reviews

QUESTION: Firstly, I would like to thank the officer team and Andy Cole for tabling revised recommendation (1) to members regarding station closures. It goes without saying that if the voting outcome concurs with this recommendation, it will be a relief to DWFRS colleagues, our communities and give us all a sense of reassurance and safety.

A continual programme of modernisation in recommendation (2) is a must – it improves outcomes, upskills colleagues, reduces cost and delivers best value for taxpayers. Conversely it is recognised inadequate funding, in whatever form, is an issue and let's not forget, government needs to resolve the council tax base growth anomaly to ensure a sustainable funding package into the future; I will personally continue to lobby for just that.

However, I challenge recommendation (3). I am concerned members are being compromised on a station closure vote and expected to agree to close all 8 fire stations today if the funding demands as set out in 2a), 2b) and 2c) are not met by February next year. So, my question is:

As it is impossible to know DWFRS financial position in 8 months' time, **will members please put forward an amendment to recommendation (3), to ensure the Fire Authority is not, under any circumstances, blindly agreeing to station closures today?**

Recommendation (3) current wording:

Should all of these conditions, in a), b) and c) above not be met, confirmation of which will be clear in budget setting papers presented to the Authority in February 2027, the Authority agree that all eight fire stations, namely, Bradford

on Avon, Cranborne, Charmouth, Hamworthy, Maiden Newton, Mere, Ramsbury and Wilton will be closed.

Recommendation (3) suggested wording:

Should all of these conditions, in a), b) and c) above not be met, confirmation of which will be clear in budget setting papers presented to the Authority in February 2027, the Authority agree that all eight fire stations, namely, Bradford on Avon, Cranborne, Charmouth, Hamworthy, Maiden Newton, Mere, Ramsbury and Wilton will be reviewed.

Response provided by Cllr Paul Oatway: You can be assured that Members are not being asked to make a decision blindly today. The Members have never been more fully informed regarding the situation and the station closures proposals under review than at today's meeting. In addition to the published papers, Members have received extensive evidence and analysis throughout this process through Member seminars and briefings.

It is recognised that, without additional funding flexibility, challenging decisions would be required to address future budget deficits, and it is anticipated that such measures could further increase risk. The Authority will consider all available information before reaching its determination at today's meeting.

Making a decision today provides a clear signal to Government that we are serious in our commitment to a Modernisation Programme for the Service.

Public Question 8. Gabriella Buchanan, Station Reviews

QUESTION: The consultation has provided no surprises when it comes to the public's views about station closures and their willingness to pay towards their funding by increasing council tax, with more than 80% of them opposing closures and willing to pay more. Surely the money spent on the consultation would have been used more wisely if it had been used to employ an independent executive advisor to look at the service's spending and what it could do to improve their financial situation, as any corporate business would in the same situation. After all, the writing has been on the wall since 2015 when the National Audit Office warned that all fire services would face a deficit in the future if they did not begin looking at their finances imminently. **Had you actioned this process over 10 years ago we would not have reached this point. Or do you not want to hear the reality of where your money is being wasted?**

RESPONSE provided by Cllr Kevin Small: As Members, we have a responsibility to ensure that the Service is well managed and delivers value for money, and we continue to challenge how resources are used. Over a number of years, the Service has made significant savings while maintaining performance, but we are acutely aware that financial pressures remain - this is detailed in the financial history section 1.12 of the station review report. The Service has been proactively managing its financial challenges for more than a decade and has delivered significant savings across all areas of the organisation during that period. These now amount to over £15 million annually. These

efficiencies have not been achieved at the expense of performance - they have enabled the Service to continue meeting its statutory responsibilities while adapting to a changing financial environment.

The Authority is assured of the Service's strong track record of financial management and continuous improvement. Independent inspections have recognised the Service's approach to efficiency, resource management and its commitment to achieving value for money for the communities it serves. This includes the findings of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

The Authority is also assured that the Service has appropriately qualified, skilled and experienced personnel across both operational and corporate functions. Delivering a modern Fire and Rescue Service requires expertise in a wide range of disciplines, all of which contribute to effective service delivery, sound governance and public safety.

We will continue to look for improvements and efficiencies, alongside delivering the Modernisation Programme while ensuring that public safety remains the priority. Essential to this is achieving the additional precept flexibility. Consultation is also an important part of making informed and accountable decisions when significant changes are proposed.

Public Question 9. Peter Edge, Station Reviews

QUESTION: Q1

I welcome the CFO's latest advice to the CFA that the proposed station closures should not now go ahead, however the Sword of Damocles still lingers for next year should the funding not be forthcoming. **I would like an assurance from the CFA that the threat of station closures and station mergers be removed on purely financial grounds and more innovative alternative financial savings be investigated.**

As an example, a recent FOI request showed that DWFRS paid £624,833 in 2024/25 in "unitary charges" linked to office space at Poundbury as well as £64,000 incurred for energy costs over the same period. Separately the service is now paying £134,000 a year for the Five Rivers HQ. These figures alone amount to nearly £3/4M!

Savings could be made by moving the HQ to Salisbury Fire Station. Other savings could be made by moving personnel to on call stations and other locations such as the training centres. The need for everyone to be in one central location is not necessary especially as there are so many staffing meetings.

In Swindon there is no need for 3 stations to deal with the risk there, Westlea was closed for months whilst renovation work was being carried out and the staff and equipment decanted to Swindon with no detriment to cover. Currently I believe that Stratton station is closed and is similarly decanted to Swindon.

Q2

Why didn't DWFRS apply for an uplift of its precept in 2025 to be implemented this financial year like other services did, and when did they know that the £1.8m grant and the 11.8% government uplift had been granted. If the service were aware of uplifts weeks ago, the undue stress to all involved at Hamworthy and Wilton could have been avoided.

RESPONSE provided by Cllr Clare Weight: Q1. The Service's Modernisation Programme, which has been included as appendix C to the published papers, highlights the projects and activities the Service intends to progress between 2026-2029. The Authority recognises the importance of ensuring that its estate represents value for money and that opportunities to reduce costs are already actively being implemented, for example the new training provision which is expected to achieve at least £100k saving a year and further opportunities are being explored. However, decisions regarding the Service's property portfolio are influenced by a range of factors, including operational requirements, workforce considerations, future service needs, lease arrangements, contractual obligations and, in some cases, long-term PFI commitments. As a result, estate rationalisation is often more complex than considering individual property costs in isolation.

The Authority has already set a clear direction to reduce reliance on leased accommodation where it is practical and beneficial to do so, and this is already being progressed. A priority of the Modernisation Programme is the wider Estate Rationalisation programme; with opportunities to further optimise the estate will continue to be assessed.

The Authority is satisfied that resources within Swindon are aligned to the assessed levels of risk and demand, and that operational arrangements are managed to maintain appropriate emergency response capability and public safety.

Q2. The process for requesting additional Council Tax precept flexibility is not something Fire and Rescue Authorities can request at their discretion. Officers met with the Fire Minister and MHCLG in October 2025 and outlined the expected financial position the Service expected over the medium-term based on estimated figures. At that meeting, the Service was advised to await the outcome of the Local Government Finance Settlement before any further discussions. The provisional settlement was released on 17 December 2025, followed by the final settlement on 9 February 2026. At no stage was the Service invited or given the opportunity of applying for precept flexibility for 2026/27. There was only one FRS that received additional precept in the wake of a change to its governance arrangements and the debts it thereby inherited.

On the issue of the core spending power, as outlined in the budget setting papers for February's Authority meeting and section 3 of today's station review paper, the Government forecasted financial position for the Authority does not reflect the local tax base growth. This amounts to a difference of £2.4 million in

council tax funding alongside a 19.5% reduction in settlement funding over the 3 year provisional settlement period.

A business case was submitted by the Service for one-off funding to support work around innovation, data, technology and service improvement on 10 April 2026, then entered into discussions over the following weeks which resulted in the one-off grant being received on 19 June 2026. While this funding is welcome, it is non-recurring and therefore does not address the Authority's ongoing structural revenue funding pressures, as previously reported.