Item 26/52 Appendix A

DORSET & WILTSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE

MODERNISATION PROGRAMME
STRATEGIC HIGHLIGHT REPORT

Strategic sponsor	Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) Jill McCrae, Director for Service Support
Period covered	June 2026 – December 2026

OVERALL PROJECT STATUS	**On Track**
SUMMARY	The Modernisation Programme provides a structured approach to improving the Service's efficiency, resilience and long-term financial sustainability, while ensuring it remains fit for the future needs of our communities. Since June 2026, progress has been made in establishing programme priorities, developing key projects and strengthening governance, accountability and oversight. The programme is continuing to be developed through its agreed governance arrangements, with delivery balanced against business-as-usual demands and careful consideration of staff capacity, workloads and wellbeing. The projects have been assessed and prioritisation has been established. Positive progress has been made across all those identified as an initial priority. The Service continues to review project priorities in light of concurrent operational, national and local challenges, adjusting timescales and sequencing where necessary to avoid placing unsustainable demands on staff. In addition, the Service will continue to monitor developments in devolution, to understand the implications and contribute to discussions, where appropriate, and consider the implications for decisions within this programme. Furthermore, to support the Service's application for precept flexibility, the Modernisation Programme priorities and their progression will be highlighted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for inclusion.

PROGRESS		Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (DWFRS) has a strong track record of delivering change, achieving £15.9m in recurring savings since combination, whilst maintaining and improving operational effectiveness.

However, increasing costs, constrained funding and changing risks and demands present ongoing financial challenges. The Service Modernisation Programme builds on previous successes, providing a structured approach to delivering further efficiencies, strengthening resilience and securing long-term financial sustainability. Importantly, it is about shaping a modern Fire and Rescue Service that is equipped to meet the current and future needs of our communities, ensuring our services, resources and ways of working remain fit for purpose.

Appendix B sets out the latest version of the Service Modernisation Programme, building on the draft presented to the Fire Authority in June 2026. The document has been further developed to provide a clear and comprehensive framework for the programme, strengthening governance, accountability and transparency across its delivery.

It sets out the projects within the Modernisation Programme, alongside wider strategic projects that contribute to its overall objectives. It also clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of key individuals, programme groups and governance meetings, together with the approach to stakeholder engagement and involvement.

To support transparency and effective oversight, the document includes a project summary (Appendix A), providing a consolidated overview of each project, the relevant decision-making responsibilities, current status as of October 2026 and the level and nature of stakeholder engagement required.

Collectively, these arrangements provide a clear framework for monitoring progress, supporting timely decision-making, managing dependencies and ensuring accountability for delivery across the programme.

Since June 2026, the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) has undertaken further work to identify and agree the projects to be progressed during the initial phase of the Modernisation Programme, focusing on those considered the highest priorities for the Service. These are summarised in Table 1 below and reflect the Service's commitment to delivering meaningful improvements, strengthening resilience and ensuring its resources and ways of working meet both current and future community needs.

The initial priorities include a trial of Rapid Response Vehicles, with planning and preparatory work underway to introduce a vehicle at Bere Regis Fire Station. The trial is expected to commence in early 2027. The Training Centre project is also continuing, alongside the development of a wider Estate Rationalisation Plan. Both are significant areas of work and are the subject of separate, detailed reports on the Finance and Audit Committee agenda.

The White Fleet Review has progressed well, with fleet data being analysed to assess whether the current arrangements are appropriate, efficient and aligned with the Service's operational and future requirements. A decision report is expected to be presented to SLT shortly, setting out proposals for an initial reduction in the number of vehicles, alongside opportunities to improve utilisation through the introduction of a vehicle pooling system. This is expected to identify further opportunities for fleet reductions over the coming years.

The Demand-Led Station Availability Review is in its early stages. This initial phase will be focused on data collection, analysis and the

		development of a robust evidence base to inform future decision-making. This work is an important foundation for the programme, ensuring that any subsequent recommendations and projects are supported by a clear understanding of current arrangements, demand and future Service requirements. The Special Appliance Review is progressing well, with decisions made in relation to wildfire vehicles, off-road appliances and heavy rescue appliances. These decisions have been informed by an assessment of current and anticipated future operational requirements, ensuring that the specialist fleet remains appropriate to the risks facing our communities. This work has now progressed into the delivery phase, with vehicles being designed and procured to support the agreed requirements. The programme has also been refined to reflect the approach being taken to improving and strengthening the On-Call firefighter model. Rather than retaining this as a single, standalone project, it will form a cross-cutting element of the Modernisation Programme and wider strategic projects. This recognises that improvements to the On-Call model will need to be considered and embedded across a number of different areas of Service activity, rather than being addressed in isolation. The relevant projects within the Modernisation Programme are identified with an asterisk (*) to highlight where this work will be incorporated. Collectively, these projects represent the first phase of delivery and demonstrate the progress being made in translating the programme's strategic objectives into practical improvements. The programme will continue to evolve as work progresses, with priorities, dependencies and emerging opportunities kept under review through the established governance arrangements.
BUDGET		The financial implications of each project within the Modernisation Programme are considered individually through the Service's established budgetary processes; while the programme is focused on improving long-term financial sustainability through savings and efficiencies, this recognises that investment may be required to deliver these benefits and support the different ways of working and resourcing needed for a modern, sustainable Fire and Rescue Service.
RISKS		The Modernisation Programme is a mitigation to support Risk 0006 'Inability to secure financial sustainability that ensures and maintains effective service provision'. Financial pressures and uncertainty over future funding threaten the Service's ability to maintain effective service provision and balanced budgets over the medium term. Efficiencies alone are insufficient; delivery of the Modernisation Programme and changes to service delivery are needed to support financial sustainability and appropriate modernisation. Table 3 within the report provides an overview of the risks and issues across the Modernisation Programme and its delivery. The main risks relate to resource capacity, operational resilience, financial pressures, procurement timescales, competing change priorities, staff engagement, project dependencies, digital implementation and wider policy changes, with mitigation through strong governance, regular monitoring, effective resource management and proactive stakeholder engagement.

NEXT STEPS	The immediate next steps are to fully establish and embed the Modernisation Programme's governance arrangements to provide effective oversight, scrutiny and direction from the outset, while continuing to develop and deliver the agreed priority projects at their respective stages of progress. This must be balanced with maintaining business as usual and, in particular, ensuring that the impact of change on staff, workloads, capacity and wellbeing remains a key consideration. The Service will need to keep delivery priorities under review in light of concurrent operational, national and local challenges, adjusting timescales and sequencing where necessary to avoid placing unsustainable demands on staff. The Service will also continue to monitor developments in devolution across Thames Valley and Wessex, seeking to understand the potential implications and actively contribute to discussions that may shape future decisions and the long-term future of the Service. Progress with the Modernisation Programme will also be reflected in the Service's application for precept flexibility, demonstrating the work underway to support financial sustainability and the delivery of a modern, resilient Fire and Rescue Service.

Table 1.

Modernisation Programme Projects

Project Name	Decision-making responsibility	Current Project Status	RAG Status	Project Update
Station Reviews (Pending Government Precept flexibility decision – Feb 2027) *	Fire Authority (Decision confirmed)	Delivery Phase Subject to precept.		Project on hold until the Government's decision on Precept flexibility. The project will progress in March 2027, as per the Authority decision (June 2026) subject to the Government's decision on Precept flexibility.
On-Call station future estate options (Pending Government Precept flexibility decision – Feb 2027) *	Fire Authority (Decision confirmed)	Delivery Phase Subject to precept		Project on hold until Government Precept flexibility decision. The project will progress in March 2027, as per the Authority decision (June 2026) subject to the Governments Precept flexibility decision.
Introduction of rapid response vehicles (RRVs)*	Chief Fire Officer	Priority In progress		The project has been identified as a priority for the Service, with the project mandate approved in September 2026. The project team is now progressing the necessary workstreams to prepare a vehicle for introduction into Service and to support an initial trial at Bere Regis

				Fire Station. The trial is expected to commence in early 2027.
Training Provision Delivery	Fire Authority	Priority Delivery Phase Authority decision confirmed.		The project continues to be a priority for the Service, with Devizes on-site work progressing. Further work for Weymouth is required and highlighted in the separate Training Centre report under agenda item 26/57.
Estate Rationalisation Plan	Fire Authority (sale/removal) Chief Fire Officer (operational use)	Priority In progress		An Estate Rationalisation plan has been developed identifying key locations for consideration. A separate Estate Rationalisation report, requiring a Fire Authority decision, has been provided as agenda item 26/56, which includes potential programmes of work across sites including Potterne, Poundbury, and Swindon and Salisbury Fire Stations.
Second White Fleet Review*	Chief Fire Officer	Priority In progress		A project mandate has been agreed, and work has been undertaken to review and analyse current fleet data. A decision report will shortly be presented to the Strategic Leadership Team, setting out recommendations to remove a number of underused vehicles from the white fleet with immediate effect, alongside proposals to improve the use of other vehicles through pooling arrangements. This approach is also expected to identify further opportunities to reduce the fleet over the next few years.
Wholetime Flexible working	Chief Fire Officer	Planned - Future		This will be a project to commence in the next Community Risk Management Plan 2028-2032.
Demand Led Station Availability Review*	Chief Fire Officer	Priority In Progress		The project mandate was approved in September 2026. The initial phase of the project will focus on data collection, analysis and the development of a robust

				evidence base to inform future decision-making and support the development of recommendations. This work will provide the foundation for a number of wider projects and is therefore a critical first step in ensuring that future proposals are evidence-led, robust and aligned with the Service's strategic priorities, risk, demand and community need.
Station Optimisation Programme*	Fire Authority	Planned - Pending		This project will not commence until the Demand Led Station Availability Review data work has been completed.
Wider Second Aways Review*	Chief Fire Officer	Planned - Pending		This project will not commence until the Demand Led Station Availability Review data work has been completed.
Special Appliance Review*	Chief Fire Officer	Priority In progress/ Delivery Phase		This project has progressed well with decisions made and delivery projects underway: Two additional wildfire vehicles, similar to the Unimog, have been approved and included in the capital programme. Water First Responder analysis has been undertaken, and decisions have been made on future provision. Training and resource requirements are being finalised along with future vehicle changes with new provisions expected to be in place around March/April 2027. The configuration of our P7 pumping appliances (heavy rescue fire appliance) has been reviewed along with the ageing Heavy Rescue Unit (HRU). A decision has been made to remove the HRU, enhance the equipment carried on P7 appliances and increase their number, widening their availability for the relevant

				incident types. The Service will move from 2 P7 appliances and a HRU to 5 P7 appliances. It is expected that all 5 P7 appliances will be on-the-run by the end of 27/28. Furthermore, the 'off-road' P4 pumping appliances have been moved to stations where they are required by the current demand and risk profile. In addition, the equipment and requirements of future P4 appliances are currently being reviewed to align to the Service's replacement programme.

Table 2.

Risks and Issues

Strategic Risk.

Strategic Risk No.	Risk Name	Risk Description	Residual (Current) Risk Score	Risk Mitigations	Mitigation progress	Direction of Risk
0006	Inability to secure financial sustainability that ensures and maintains effective service provision	Funding of the Service and its current delivery model is increasingly difficult through securing financial efficiencies alone. Changes to service delivery are now needed following combination to secure further reductions in spending plans to set balanced budgets over the medium term. Central Government plans to review the fire funding formula increase the risk of future funding reductions.	20	A Medium-Term Finance Plan (MTFP) that supports the delivery of the Community Safety Plan.		→
				A Reserves Strategy to support the MTFP and Strategic Assessment of Risk.		
				High standards of financial governance.		
				Continued engagement with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC)		
				Engagement through MHCLG and engagement with wider funding formula work.		
				Principles of efficiency and value for money are embedded in decision-making, planning and reporting Service wide.		

				Service Modernisation Programme 2026-2029 to secure financial savings and a programme of better matching resources to risk and demand.		

Overall Modernisation Programme Risk Position

Overall risk rating		**Direction**	
The main risks to the programme relate to the availability of resources, maintaining operational resilience, financial pressures, procurement challenges and the impact of managing several areas of change at the same time. These pressures could affect delivery timescales and the achievement of planned benefits. The Service must also continue to meet its operational responsibilities. Other areas requiring ongoing attention include staff engagement, dependencies between projects, the implementation of new digital systems and changes in the wider policy and governance environment. To manage these risks, the Service will maintain strong programme governance and oversight, regularly review priorities, resources and budgets, and closely monitor procurement and contract arrangements. Ongoing engagement with staff, Representative Bodies and partners will also be important in identifying and resolving issues early. Regular reviews of programme progress and operational performance will help ensure that emerging pressures are identified and appropriate action is taken to keep delivery on track.			