DORSET & WILTSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Item 26/52

MEETING	Finance & Audit Committee
DATE OF MEETING	2 December 2026
SUBJECT OF THE REPORT	Modernisation Programme Strategic Highlight Report
STATUS OF REPORT	For publication
PURPOSE OF REPORT	For update and assurance
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	This report provides the first six-monthly update on the Service's 2026–2029 Modernisation Programme, supporting scrutiny of progress towards financial sustainability and a modern, resilient Service. Appendix A provides Members with the Strategic Update report and Appendix B provides the up-to-date Modernisation Programme for the Service. Priorities are to embed governance and deliver agreed projects alongside business as usual, adapting delivery to operational pressures and external developments while protecting staff capacity and wellbeing. Modernisation will progress alongside the pursuit of precept flexibility.
RISK ASSESSMENT	The Modernisation Programme supports long-term financial sustainability amid rising costs and funding uncertainty, highlighted in Strategic Risk 0006 'Inability to secure financial sustainability that ensures and maintains effective service provision'. Efficiencies alone are insufficient; modernisation and changes to service delivery are also required.
COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT	None for the purposes of this report, although impact assessments are undertaken aligned to the projects within the Modernisation Programme.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT	None for the purposes of this report, although impact assessments are undertaken aligned to the projects within the Modernisation Programme.
BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	The financial implications of individual projects within the Modernisation Programme will be considered through the Service's established budgetary processes. While the Programme aims to strengthen long-term financial sustainability through savings and efficiencies, it recognises that targeted investment may be required to enable change and support the new ways of working and resourcing needed to deliver a modern, sustainable Service.
RECOMMENDATIONS	It is recommended that Members: i) Review and note the progress of the Modernisation Programme, as highlighted in the Strategic Update provided as Appendix A. ii) Review and note the updated Service Modernisation Programme, set out in Appendix B, including the arrangements for governance, delegations and engagement.
APPENDICES	Appendix A – Modernisation Programme Strategic Highlight Report Appendix B – Service Modernisation Programme – Version 2.
BACKGROUND PAPERS	Fire Authority Minutes June 2026
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1. Introduction

1.1 Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (DWFRS) has an established record of delivering change. Since its formation through combination, the Service has achieved £15.9 million in recurring savings while maintaining and improving its operational effectiveness. This has largely been delivered through its previous Resource & Savings Programme (RSP).

1.2 As part of the RSP, the Authority undertook a programme of Station Reviews, which led to consideration of the closure of eight on-call fire stations across Dorset and Wiltshire. At its meeting on 30 June 2026, the Authority agreed that all eight stations would remain open, subject to being granted sufficient council tax precept flexibility for 2027/28 to raise its precept to at least the national average for fire and rescue services, subsequent approval of the increase by the Authority in February 2027, and no further reductions in funding. The Authority also agreed that, should these conditions not be met, all eight stations would close.

1.3 Securing appropriate council tax precept flexibility and delivering modernisation are both essential to the Service's long-term financial sustainability and its ability to meet future needs. Modernisation must therefore progress alongside the pursuit of precept flexibility, addressing rising costs and ensuring that the Service continues to adapt to changing risks and demands. The Service Modernisation Programme represents the next iteration of the Resource & Savings Programme (RSP), building on its achievements. Its purpose extends beyond delivering savings: it provides a structured approach to ensuring that the Service's resources, services and ways of working meet the current and future needs of the communities it serves.

1.4 During the Authority's June 2026 meeting, it was agreed that the Finance & Audit Committee would monitor and scrutinise the progress of the Modernisation Programme.

1.5 Strategic update reports will therefore be provided to the committee every six months. The first update is provided as Appendix A to this report.

2. Modernisation Programme

2.1 The Service Modernisation Programme has been documented for the period 2026–2029 but must remain a living document, reviewed and updated iteratively to reflect concurrent operational pressures and national and local challenges. The timing, sequencing and focus of activity will need to adapt to these demands, avoiding unsustainable pressures on staff. The programme must also take account of developments outside the Service's control, including local government reorganisation and devolution developments.

2.2 The latest version of the programme is provided as Appendix B. This has been developed further since the June 2026 draft to reflect these considerations and

provide a clear and comprehensive framework for the programme, strengthening governance, accountability and transparency throughout its delivery.

2.3 To support transparency and effective oversight, the Modernisation Programme document (Appendix B) includes a project summary (Appendix A, within the document). This provides details of each project, with the relevant decision-making responsibilities and the level and nature of stakeholder engagement required.

3. Summary and Next Steps

3.1 The immediate priority for the Service is to embed the programme governance for effective oversight and scrutiny, and progress agreed projects while maintaining business as usual.

3.2 Delivery priorities, timescales and sequencing will remain under review in response to operational, national and local challenges, protecting staff capacity and wellbeing.

3.3 The Service will also monitor progression of devolution and utilise the Modernisation Programme progress to inform the application for precept flexibility, demonstrating action towards financial sustainability and a modern, resilient Service.

3.4 The Finance and Audit Committee will receive their next update report at their meeting in July 2027.