

## Report of the Chief Fire Officer

### Resource Review

#### Purpose of report

1. To review how the Authority can respond to the challenges around On-Call availability, improve the resilience of the Service overall and ensure the most efficient and effective use of resources.
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#### Recommendation

##### *It is recommended that:*

1. *the following proposals be supported, subject to consideration of the responses to public consultation:*
  - (i) *removal of eight On-Call fire engines (from multi-pump fire stations);*
  - (ii) *increase Wholetime workforce numbers to provide more on duty firefighters;*
  - (iii) *develop a new blended staffing model at some locations to improve availability;*
  - (iv) *change the cover model of one other fire engine to widen the area of potential On-Call staff;*
  - (v) *provide alternative, more flexible modes of transport for available firefighters to attend incidents, at some locations; and*
  - (vi) *focus on additional prevention activity in some areas.*
2. *Officers be authorised to go out to public consultation on the proposals.*

#### Introduction and Background

2. This Resource Review has been undertaken to understand and assure the Fire Authority, stakeholders, and the community that the Authority is making the best use of the available resources and funding to provide the most effective service possible.
3. The Authority currently deploys 41 fire engines across 25 fire stations in different ways. All 25 of the Authority's fire stations have at least one fire engine that is crewed by On-Call firefighters. Of these, 17 fire stations within the two counties are solely crewed by On-Call firefighters. The eight busier fire stations are in the larger towns and cities and currently have a mix of fire engines crewed by both Wholetime and On-Call firefighters, where the Wholetime fire engine is normally the first to be deployed.

4. The Service attends 7,366 incidents per year (on average) and attends 68% more incidents in the daytime than it does at night.
5. Not all fire engines are used equally, for a variety of reasons, which are explored in this review. The first fire engine at each location is used the most. Therefore, this review does not propose to close any fire station or remove or reduce any first fire engine at any location. These proposals would mean that in some locations the first fire engine would have increased crewing, resilience, and faster response times.
6. Having completed a comprehensive review of availability and incident data, Officers are now able to recommend several changes to ensure that resources are used in a more effective way. All relevant information has been collated into the Resource Review document (Appendix 1). The base data used has been collated into a Data Pack which is available for review online <https://www.hwfire.org.uk/your-right-to-know/consultation/>.

### **Why a review?**

7. The Authority faces several challenges in ensuring that the On-Call firefighter duty system is sustainable and affordable for the future. The On-Call duty system is the foundation for fire cover across both counties, but in recent years has seen an increase in costs and the need for a larger number of staff required to support it, alongside a decline in the availability of some fire engines.
8. There is also a need to develop and change some of the On-Call ways of staffing and working and this review proposes several new ways of utilising and staffing On-Call fire engines.
9. There is an acute need to improve resilience on the busiest Wholetime fire engines and reduce the excessive need for overtime shifts to be worked. This review aims to ensure that, where possible, there is an improvement in fire engine availability across the Service. These proposals will also see some first (and busiest) fire engines that are routinely crewed with four firefighters being crewed with five firefighters. This additional resilience will then release staff currently used to support Wholetime fire engines to then be able support On-Call fire engines, in particular during the daytime.

### **On-Call challenges**

10. There is a growing difficulty in recruiting and retaining sufficient On-Call firefighters in many locations, with the correct skills to keep appliances available 24/7. This is an issue that affects all On-Call appliances to some degree, and not just those on multi-pump stations where it is often the most acute. People in our communities are now more reluctant to give up their personal time to be On-Call and businesses are more reluctant to release people to be On-Call firefighters.
11. Due to the above pressures and other societal factors, those who are On-Call firefighters now tend not to provide the same amounts of cover as was the norm

in the past. Therefore, the Authority needs to employ significantly more people providing less cover to maintain high levels of availability, which has a significant cost implication.

12. The Authority currently employs around 370 On-Call firefighters. If all existing On-Call appliances were to be fully crewed then it is estimated that the number employed would need to increase to over 500 and whilst a recent On-Call recruitment project has had some success, it is not realistic to think such a target would be achievable, affordable, or sustainable.
13. The problem of On-Call recruitment and retention has been a downward trend for some years. In the past, Wholetime staff would have been utilised to bolster On-Call crews and help keep fire engines on the run wherever possible. However, those resources are now having to be utilised primarily to underpin the Wholetime system.

### **Wholetime resilience**

14. The decisions the Authority had to take in 2014 in the face of severe budgetary reductions were necessary and appropriate at the time, but they have left the Service with very little resilience in the Wholetime shift system which crews the busiest fire engines that attend thousands of calls per year. The use of overtime shifts undertaken by all operational staff has increased significantly to keep Wholetime fire engines available due to a lack of inbuilt resilience and staffing shortages, which has become an inefficient use of funding, and may not be sustainable.
15. Increasing Wholetime staffing levels in some locations to have five firefighters usually available each shift instead of four has two benefits. Firstly, there is inbuilt resilience for unexpected absences or training events where the fire engine can still be available with the remaining four firefighters. Secondly, it also means when this capacity is not being utilised the fire engine will respond with five firefighters instead of four, providing more firefighters on the busiest fire engines, to thousands of incidents per year.

### **How do we solve it?**

16. To address these issues this proposal aims to reinvest all the money saved by removing the eight fire engines to improve the resilience in the Wholetime duty system, to release capacity to support the On-Call staff, and to provide some Wholetime firefighters on two On-Call locations during the day to increase resilience and carry out prevention work. In doing so we will create a more sustainable reduced On-Call duty workforce, develop new ways of working and optimise the use of the available Wholetime and On-Call staff.

### **How will we do this?**

17. Having carefully considered the options for reinvestment the following is recommended:

- Increase Wholetime workforce numbers to provide more on duty firefighters.
  - Develop a new blended model at some locations.
  - Change the cover model of one other fire engine to widen the area of potential On-Call staff.
  - Provide alternative, more flexible modes of transport at some locations.
  - Focus on additional prevention activity in some areas.
18. Please note the review does not propose closing any fire stations or first fire engines and all the funding achieved by the removal of the fire engines will be reinvested in crewing the remaining busier fire engines.

### **What did the Review find?**

19. To conduct this review, data has been collated and analysed from a range of sources, to build a picture of how well utilised these fire engines have been. The analysis examined three years of data and found that on average the Service attends 7,366 incidents per year and attends 68% more incidents in the daytime than it does at night.
20. The fire engines examined in this review:
- Are the least used across the Service.
  - Attend an incident as the first or only fire engine less than 4 times per year on average when there is no other fire engine available to attend on the same station at the time of the incident (a total of 29 per year on average for the eight fire engines).
  - Attend on average a total of 410 incidents each year including times when they have attended as a supporting fire engine (just 5.57% of all incidents attended by HWFRS).
  - Attend a total of 220 incidents (2.99% of all incidents) each year as the first or only fire engine; however, analysis shows that 192 of these incidents there was another fire engine available on the same station that could have attended instead of them.
  - This means the removal of these eight fire engines would have affected the response times to only 29 incidents of the 7,366 total incidents the service attends on average each year (an average of four incidents per fire engine or 0.38%).
  - In addition, they attend on average just 335 incidents (4.54% of all incidents) each year in their own station area and are not used at 47.33% of the incidents they attend (they attend for less than 20 minutes).
  - The cost per year associated with retaining these eight fire engines is a total of £881,000.
21. Between the period of 01/04/2022 and 31/03/2023 the fire engines identified have not been available to respond to an emergency 68% of the time (on average) as they often do not have suitably qualified, skilled, or enough available On-Call firefighters to crew the fire engine at the time required.

## What are the Proposals?

22. The proposal is that eight On-Call fire engines are removed (from multi-pump fire stations) and for one other fire engine to have a change to its cover model, allowing resources to be reallocated:
- 4<sup>th</sup> fire engine at Wyre Forest Station – reduced On-Call unit to remain on the Station.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> fire engine at Redditch Station – reduced On-Call unit to remain on the Station.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> fire engine at Bromyard Station– reduced On-Call unit to remain on the Station.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> fire engine at Malvern Station – reduced On-Call unit to remain on the Station mainly for special appliances.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> fire engine at Leominster Station– reduced On-Call unit to remain on the Station.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> fire engine at Hereford Station– night cover On-Call unit only to remain on the Station.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> fire engine at Droitwich Station– On-Call unit to be removed in its entirety.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> fire engine at Worcester Station– night cover On-Call unit only to remain on the Station.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> fire engine at Wyre Forest Station – cover model change to nights only and increased turn in time for firefighters to eight minutes.

## What is the Reinvestment?

23. The table below summarises the proposed reinvestment:

Station	Proposal
Wyre Forest	First crewed fire engine will increase Wholetime crewing from four to five firefighters on most occasions, On-Call units will crew special appliances (as required at those locations) and use a dedicated 4-wheel drive vehicle.
Worcester	
Hereford	
Malvern	On-Call units will crew special appliances (as required at those locations) and use a dedicated 4-wheel drive vehicle.
Redditch	
Leominster	On-Call units will crew special appliances (as required at those locations), use a dedicated 4-wheel drive vehicle, and will receive an establishment of Wholetime staff to improve the level of fire cover for the first fire engine, reduce response times and increase the available resources to significantly improve the prevention work undertaken in these communities.
Bromyard	

## The Benefits

24. Based upon the analysis completed during this review, the proposed changes will provide a more resilient fire service for members of the public. No fire stations are being closed and there will normally be more firefighters riding the busiest fire engines. The Service's fire stations will still normally have the first fire engine to respond in an emergency. Furthermore, the investments proposed should improve the availability of some of the first 25 fire engines and support for many On-Call fire engines.
25. There are several other benefits to the public which include:
  - Increased delivery of prevention activities
  - Over 50 firefighters immediately on duty in the day
  - 23 firefighters immediately available on duty at night
  - Ability to deploy additional available firefighters to incidents
  - More efficient and effective use of available resources

## Financial Savings and Reinvestment

26. The aim of the review is to ensure that the best service is provided to the local community with the available resources.
27. The review will generate potential savings of £981,000 that could be reinvested. The estimated costs of the proposed reinvestment back into the front line are £967,000.
28. Alongside the current planned Day-Crewing changes, and the resources realised this could increase the overall numbers of Wholetime firefighters to:
  - Over 50 firefighters on duty in the day (an increase of 20%).
  - 23 firefighters immediately available on duty at night (an increase of 15%).
29. The proposed changes will be phased in to allow for an evolution into the new delivery model.

## Timescales

30. The proposed timescales for delivering the review are:

December 2023	Paper and report presented to the Fire Authority seeking permission to consult on the proposal.
January to March 2024	Public and staff consultation on the proposals.
April/May 2024	Feedback from consultation reviewed and further analysis undertaken as required. Final version of report and recommendations prepared.
June 2024	Paper and final report presented to the Fire Authority for decision.

31. It is proposed to enter a period of public consultation on the proposals. A copy of the proposed consultation questions are available at Appendix 2.
32. Following consultation, amendments may be made, and the Fire Authority will be presented with a final report for consideration.
33. Subject to approval, changes will be phased in to realise savings and rationalise staff numbers via natural turnover wherever possible. It is anticipated that the changes may need to be phased in over several, years, however some changes can be made much more quickly, with some funding necessary to introduce a full number of Wholetime firefighters before steady state savings are achieved in the future.

## Conclusion

34. Should the Fire Authority approve the final proposal in June 2024 it would release funding which could be reinvested, supporting the core Response and Prevention strategies, and building a more sustainable long-term future for the On-Call staffing model.

## Corporate Considerations

<p><b>Resource Implications</b> (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)</p>	<p>The Resource Review is focused on the allocation of resources and so has an impact on finances, in terms of savings and reinvestment, increases in Wholetime establishment, and changes to the number and types of vehicles within the Service.</p>
<p><b>Strategic Policy Links &amp; Core Code of Ethics</b> (Identify how proposals link with current priorities &amp; policy framework and align to the Core Code of Ethics)</p>	<p>This Review contributes to the aims stated in the CRMP (Community Risk Management Plan) 2021-25 and Core Strategies in particular the Response Strategy and Prevention Strategy.</p> <p>It links to the Effectiveness and Efficiency aims of the HMICFRS.</p> <p>The improvements considered within the Review are also aimed at Putting Our Communities First element of the Core Code of Ethics.</p>
<p><b>Risk Management / Health &amp; Safety</b> (identify any risks, the proposed control measures, and risk evaluation scores).</p>	<p>N/A</p>

<b>Consultation</b> (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	Consultation will be taking place with staff. In addition, a period of public consultation will be facilitated by an external partner.
<b>Equalities</b> (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	Yes
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b> (where personal data is processed a DPIA must be completed to ensure compliant handling)	N/A

### Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Resource Review (separate document)

Appendix 2 – Proposed Consultation Questions