

## Report of the Chief Fire Officer

### Resource Review – Proposed Changes Following Consultation

#### Purpose of report

1. To provide the Authority with the responses from the Resource Review consultation process and to propose that the Authority decides upon the proposals being put forward in relation to the Resource Review.

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#### Recommendations

***It is recommended that, following full consideration of the responses received as part of the Resource Review consultation process, the:***

- i. Fire Authority authorises the removal of the following On-Call staffed fire engines at the identified locations:***
  - a. The third (On-Call) fire engine at Redditch.***
  - b. The fourth (On-Call) fire engine at Wyre Forest.***
  - c. The third (On-Call) fire engine at Worcester.***
  - d. The second (On-Call) fire engine at Droitwich.***
  - e. The second (On-Call) fire engine at Bromyard.***
  - f. The third (On-Call) fire engine at Hereford.***
  - g. The second (On-Call) fire engine at Leominster.***
- ii. Second (On-Call) fire engine at Malvern be retained, subject to a further review in two years' time based upon the usage and availability over that period.***
- iii. Third (On-Call) fire engine at Wyre Forest remains, but is required to be crewed at night time only and may recruit staffing from a wider area within an eight-minute response time radius of the fire station.***
- iv. Resources available as a result of these operational changes to be reinvested to provide:***
  - a. Additional Wholetime crewing to add resilience to the Wholetime duty system across the Service and to provide increased fire engine crew sizes, as often as possible, on the first fire engines at: Worcester, Wyre Forest and Hereford fire stations.***
  - b. Provide a contingent of Wholetime Firefighters at each of Leominster and Bromyard fire stations to improve the***

***availability of those appliances and undertake additional fire prevention activities in those areas.***

***c. Provide 4x4 type vehicles (or similar alternatives) for the utilisation of additional available On-Call Firefighters to provide a more flexible way of deploying them to support operational incidents, at the following stations: Worcester, Hereford, Redditch, Wyre Forest, Bromyard and Leominster.***

***v. The implementation and timing of these changes be delegated to the Chief Fire Officer.***

## **Introduction and Background**

2. On 12 December 2023, the Fire Authority gave approval to commence consultation on the Resource Review. The Fire Authority also resolved to form a Task and Finish Group to consider all consultation responses.
3. The Resource Review aims to:
  - Improve resilience and staffing on the busier Wholetime crewed fire engines that will then release capacity to support On-Call fire engines.
  - Reduce the levels of overtime used to crew Wholetime fire engines.
  - Create a more sustainable On-Call duty workforce.
  - Develop new ways of working with On-Call staff.
  - Optimise the use of the available On-Call staff.
  - Increase the levels of prevention activity in some areas.
4. Consultation on the Resource Review was undertaken between 08 January and 04 March 2024 and conducted by independent consultants Opinion Research Services (ORS). In addition, the Service held 27 formal consultation sessions with 202 staff at the affected fire stations and numerous meetings with elected officials and stakeholders. ORS's report of findings was submitted on 19 April 2024.
5. At a meeting on 23 April 2024, the Task and Finish Working Group (Group Leaders from the Fire Authority) considered the breadth of consultation responses achieved and whether the report drafted by ORS reflected those responses. Having considered the responses, the Task and Finish Group confirmed that they were satisfied that the report properly reflects the breadth of consultation responses received.
6. It should be stressed that the Resource Review does not propose to close any fire station or to remove any 'first' fire engines, but intends to remove fire engines from fire stations with more than one fire engine, where these second, third or fourth fire engines are often not available and/or attend a very low number of incidents each year and most often as a supporting fire engine.

7. Members should also note that these proposals align to a much wider national issue that nearly all Fire Services with On-Call staffing are currently facing. Many FRSs are facing the challenge of declining availability of On-Call fire engines, predominantly due to the inability to recruit and retain On-Call firefighters 24/7. This is leading to many other FRSs to also consider the need to potentially reduce the number of On-Call fire engines and/or staff, and increase Wholetime staffing. Examples of similar recent proposals can be seen in Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, East Sussex, Gloucestershire and, most recently, across 350 fire stations in Scotland. The proposals in this Resource Review appear much less impactful on the community than are apparent elsewhere and demonstrate a pragmatic, sympathetic and progressive approach to modernising and making HWFRS more efficient and effective.

### **His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS)**

8. In the most recent State of Fire Report May 2024 it clearly recognises that On-Call staffing is a significant national concern for the sector, highlighting the acute challenges around the On-Call duty system. It shows that most FRSs are experiencing difficulties in maintaining On-Call availability, the recruitment and retention of On-Call firefighters, the effects of increased training times and the need to maintain competency requirements. It stated that a system-wide and constructive response is required to meet this challenge.
9. In HWFRS most recent HMICFRS report (November 2023) it is clearly stated that the Service should continuously look for ways to improve our effectiveness and efficiency. This includes transforming some of the ways we work and where possible improve value for money. The Service should have robust spending plans that reflect future financial challenges, take efficiency opportunities and invest in better services for the public.
10. The Inspectorate also noted that HWFRS is aware that the second and third fire engines, at some fire stations, are not often used to attend emergencies, and noted that HWFRS plans to carry out a Resource Review (before the next CRMP), to assure itself that it is deploying its fire engines and response staff to manage risk efficiently.
11. HMICFRS have a clear position on the need of an FRS to be efficient, effective and productive. Therefore, maintaining eight On-Call fire engines with poor availability, very low usage and no reasonable long-term prospect of improving would not be demonstrating an efficient and effective FRS.

## Public and Staff Consultation on the Resource Review

12. The Resource Review was published in December 2023 and proposed to remove eight On-Call fire engines allowing savings to be reinvested in other, busier, fire engines to improve resilience and crewing levels and support more prevention work within some communities. The fire engines identified for removal were:
  - Fourth fire engine at Wyre Forest Station.
  - Third fire engine at Redditch Station.
  - Second fire engine at Bromyard Station.
  - Second fire engine at Malvern Station.
  - Second fire engine at Leominster Station.
  - Third fire engine at Hereford Station.
  - Second fire engine at Droitwich Station.
  - Third fire engine at Worcester Station
  
13. In addition, there was one proposed cover change:
  - Third fire engine at Wyre Forest – night cover only and Firefighters be allowed up to 8 minutes to get to the station.
  
14. ORS hosted an online questionnaire and three public focus groups. Notice of the consultation was sent to all Fire Authority Members and it was widely publicised through the Service website, social media, the internal Bulletin, through press releases and it was communicated to all local authorities, including parish councils, local organisations and other stakeholders.
  
15. In addition to this, every potentially affected Watch/Station was visited by the Chief Fire Officer or Principal Officer and engagement sessions were held with all the employee representative bodies.
  
16. In total there were 49,352 views of social media posts across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. 3,000 people visited the consultation web page.
  
17. ORS have provided a report to summarise their findings related to the consultation on the Resource Review (Appendix A). The report confirms that the level of engagement with staff, representative bodies, councillors and members of the public was in their view, extensive over the consultation period:
  - 1,122 responses were received to the online consultation questionnaire.
  - Three public focus groups were attended by 28 residents.
  - 202 members of staff were spoken to as part of the staff engagement process.

- There were eight written submissions from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), Fire and Rescue Services Association (FRSA), Leominster Town Council, Malvern Town Council, Redditch Borough Council, two individual town/county councillors and one firefighter – see Appendix A.
  - Where required full and detailed responses were individually sent to these submissions above, by the Chief Fire Officer – see Appendix A.
  - Three BBC news and radio interviews.
  - Responses to 20 social media enquiries.
  - 49 meetings with MP's, other CFOs and stakeholders.
  - Attendance at two Town Council Meetings.
  - Meeting with HMICFRS.
18. A key theme that emerged from most of the consultation groups (online, focus groups, meetings with stakeholders, politicians and staff) was that an initial reaction to the loss of eight fire engines was met with some concern and or rejection, in principle, usually aligned to a deeper concern about the degrading of key public services. However, when the listener or reader had the opportunity to understand better the wider context of the Resource Review and the reinvestment programme, many then changed their position and supported the proposals. This particularly of note in regard to the Focus Group meetings led by ORS and conducted with members of the public from across both Counties.
19. The conclusions drawn from the consultation period are that:
20. Resident Focus Groups
- a. Almost all focus group participants across the three groups ultimately supported Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service's (HWFRS) proposed approach, considering the overall package of proposals to be considered, creative and logical.
  - b. Several people from the focus groups said their views had changed during the discussion, and that their initial reservations about the proposals had been addressed and they left the session more reassured about the proposals and their potential implications.
21. Open Questionnaire
- a. The results from the questionnaire show a lower level of support for the Resource Review, with higher levels of disagreement with each proposal and around a third agreeing overall that HWFRS should change the way it uses its resources to address current challenges.
  - b. Table 15, on page 46 of Appendix A, summarises the level of support for each proposal.

c. Analysing the questionnaire responses by respondent demographic showed that the level of agreement varied between separate groups. The differences by question are reported in Chapter three of ORS report, but in general terms, those:

- Who work for HWFRS or another FRS were significantly more likely to agree with the proposals.
- Living in Herefordshire or another area (i.e., outside Herefordshire and Worcestershire) and those aged 45-54 were also significantly more likely to agree with most of the proposals.
- Living in Worcester or Malvern Hills, those aged under 35 years, those who are female and those who have a disability, were also more likely to disagree with most of the proposals.

d. ORS stress that it should be remembered that open questionnaires are not surveys or a referendum and are, therefore, not a representative sample of a given population – they are more likely to be completed by motivated people or groups.

22. The Report of findings from ORS, attached as Appendix A, includes a full analysis of comments received along with a demographic profile of respondents.

### **Additional Data to Emerge during the Consultation**

23. In responding to some queries during the consultation period additional data was produced. It is useful to note that during the year 2023, across the whole of Herefordshire and Worcestershire combined, the 41 fire engines attended 7,774 incidents, of which:

- 84% were attended by one fire engine only.
- 13% were attended by two fire engines.
- 3% were attended by three or more fire engines.

24. Responses to specific queries raised by individuals and groups during the consultation period were also produced and these can be found in full in Appendix A from page 65. A summary of a selection can be found below:

### **Worcester High-Rise Buildings**

25. It is no surprise that following the Grenfell Tower tragedy in London in 2017, that the public may harbour concerns about fires in other high-rise buildings within the UK. It should firstly be made clear that HWFRS has very few high-rise buildings and that they are constructed differently to Grenfell Tower, which are comparatively much smaller and have a very low level of serious incidents.

26. Having reviewed data specifically relating to high-rise buildings in Worcester during the last five years (01 Jan 2019 to 31 Dec 2023), the Service attended 248 incidents (approximately 50 per year), at the three high-rise buildings in Worcester, with only 1% of these being very (minor) small fires.
- 227 of these incidents are classed as False Alarms (92%).
  - 18 Special Services (7%). These are incidents other than a fire such as lift rescues or gaining entry.
  - 3 of these incidents were classed as Fires (1%). On average this equates to 0.6 Fires per year.
27. The third fire engine at Worcester has only attended 54 of the 248 incidents (22%) in the past five years and was not available to attend an additional 83 out of 248 (33%). This was due to not having a crew available. Therefore, on every other occasion, the role of the third fire engine has been safely undertaken by the next nearest fire engine available.
28. Even though the high reach Aerial Ladder Platform is mobilised when it is available, it attended none of the incidents in the high-rise buildings in St. Johns during the past five years.

### **Droitwich – General Concerns by Employees and Residents**

29. Combined, the two fire engines at Droitwich Spa attended an average 273 incidents per year within their station ground (or 820 in total over a three-year period).
30. 97% of incidents in the Droitwich area only required only one fire engine to attend.
31. The second fire engine from Droitwich attended a total of 137 calls over the three-year period analysed, an average of only 46 calls per year or less than 1 call per week, and of the 137 calls over three years, 51 of these calls were false alarms.
32. The second fire engine at Droitwich attends just 16.5% of Droitwich's total calls. The second fire engine was only available on average of 27% of the time over the three-year period.

### **Redditch – General Concerns raised by Local Council**

33. Between April 2022 and March 2023, the third fire engine at Redditch has only been available 2.74% of the time during the day and 21.25% of the time during the night. This means the fire engine is not available to respond to emergencies for the majority of time. This has been the situation for some considerable time despite repeated attempts at recruitment in the area.

34. The third fire engine at Redditch has very low operational usage and even if it was available 100% of the time, it would still not be used very often. Having analysed data over a three-year period, the third fire engine at Redditch attends an average of only 31 incidents per year. Of these, 28 are inside its own station ground and only 3 are outside of its station ground. This equates to 0.42% of total incidents across the Service per annum. The data also shows that the third fire engine at Redditch attended on average only one incident per year when there was no other fire engine available to attend from the station.

### **Leominster – General Concern raised by Local Council**

35. Between April 2022 and March 2023, over 73% of all incidents Leominster’s fire station responded to, required only one fire engine.
36. On average, the second fire engine is only available 11.87% of the time in the day and 35.86% at night meaning that most of the time the second fire engine is not available to attend these incidents.
37. The total number of calls Leominster fire station attends remains relatively similar over a 14-year period, the number of incidents involving fire is decreasing. Leominster only attended 194 calls last year, that is only around one call every 48 hours and 47% (almost half) of those are false alarms. It should also be noted that there is another fire station (Kingsland) nearby, with consistently very high availability.

### **UK wide comparative incidents and resources**

38. Additional evaluation has been undertaken with other Fire Services comparable to HWFRS, and whilst a range of factors that can affect incidents, type and volume, and the number of fire engines needed, it is worth noting the following:

Fire Authority	Fire Engines	Annual Incidents (Apr 22 – Mar 23)
Bedfordshire	22	7,779
Buckinghamshire	30	8,216
Cambridgeshire	36	8,455
County Durham and Darlington	26	8,849
HWFRS	41	8,156

### **Resource Review Final Proposals**

39. Following staff and public consultation and receipt of the Report of Findings from ORS, the proposals within the Resource Review remain mostly unchanged. However, it is relevant to highlight some amendments to the proposals as outlined in this section and reflected in the updated Resource Review document (Appendix B). Those key changes are detailed below:



## **Malvern Fire Station**

40. As shown in Recommendation ii above, in response to feedback received and further consideration, an amendment is proposed; which is to maintain Malvern's second fire engine for a period of two years after which a review of availability, cover moves and numbers of incidents attended will be conducted.
41. Whilst, as Chief Fire Officer, I believe there is still a case for the removal of the second fire engine in Malvern that based upon the need within the Malvern area, I accept it would be prudent to review this in two years' time due to the following factors outside of the Malvern town area:
  - The availability of some nearby stand alone On-Call stations needs further improvement which is currently underway but may take some time to fully implement. Retaining the second fire engine in Malvern to provide an additional fire engine some of the time during this period.
  - Utilising the second fire engine from Malvern as a cover move into Worcester (as proposed by the Malvern On-Call staff). If the fire engines in Worcester are deployed for a protracted period, this prevents the need for a fire engine from another location being used.
  - Financially this proposal has only a very minor impact on the Resource Review as the review proposed to keep most of the staff at Malvern to crew the numerous special appliances located there. The Malvern On-Call watch also have enough staff to improve their availability without the need to recruit more firefighters, if they are upskilled and they have now indicated a willingness to do this. Also, as the staff suggested, the second fire engine could be a Compact fire engine with lower running costs.
42. Upon completion of this review after a period of two years, a recommendation may be presented to the Fire Authority for further consideration.

## **Provision of Vehicles for additional available On Call staff**

43. As stated in the Resource Review document on page 46, there will be a reinvestment to provide an alternative 4x4 (or similar) type vehicle at specified locations. Following consultation with staff members, at some locations they may prefer an alternative vehicle such as a van for example to provide additional resilience for such specialist functions as Water First Responders or Animal Rescue. This request has been accepted, and will be taken forward and discussions with local stations will determine what type of alternative vehicle is best suited depending on the needs of the local community.

## Special Appliances

44. Following consultation with staff, the Service will explore ways to continue to utilise On-Call staff to support certain special appliances in order to support availability and resilience, such as the Ariel Ladder Platforms at Hereford and Worcester. It is also proposed to review the current locations of some special appliances, so as to optimise the available staff and ensure first fire engine resilience is not adversely affected.

## Financial Impact of Amendments

45. The budgetary impact of the amendments will occur over a number of years, but will involve a significant shift in resources within the budget. Some savings can be made quickly upon the implementation of the proposals if approved, however in a steady-state it is anticipated that resource changes falling from this review are as below:

	£m
Wholetime Pay	0.687
On-Call Pay	(0.359)
Support Pay	(0.044)
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Employee Related	0.284
Operational Logistics	(0.022)
Human Resources	(0.012)
ICT	(0.008)
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Running Costs	(0.042)
Capital Financing	(0.242)
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	0.000

46. These adjustments will be realised over time and brought before the Policy & Resources Committee for information as and when this happens. The Treasurer will then be able to demonstrate that the re-investment has only taken place when the relevant savings are achieved. However, some funding has already been identified to prime these changes and enable some of the investments to be made ahead of the savings being realised.
47. As noted in the Resource Review the pay costing above only takes into account a relatively modest saving from the current circa £700k overtime (resilience register) costs, and it is hoped that further efficiencies can be realised in this area over the longer term through improvements in wholetime crewing and resilience.

## Conclusion/Summary

48. To conclude, a comprehensive consultation process has now been completed and amendments made to the Resource Review proposals. The proposals remain largely unchanged and Members are urged to support the recommendation in this paper.
49. Officers and many staff, firmly believe this is only viable and efficient solution to address the very significant issues currently being faced in regards of Wholetime and On-Call staffing. The issues highlighted in the Resource Review report are not going to improve naturally in the longer term and an increase in funding is also unlikely to emerge at any time in the future, to provide greater numbers of employed staff.
50. It is also incumbent on the Service to provide an efficient provision of resources with the tax payer funded budget it receives and to retain fire engines with low availability and very low usage, would neither be an effective or efficient use of public money.
51. Officers fully appreciate the removal of fire engines will always be an emotive and controversial matter. However, as has been demonstrated the issues faced with wholetime and On-call staffing are acute and reflect a much wider national issue. It is important that the Fire Authority consider carefully how the Service can keep ahead of these issues and retain an efficient and effective response to our communities.

## Corporate Considerations

<b>Resource Implications</b> (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	Savings made will be reinvested into other busier fire engines to improve resilience and crewing levels and support more prevention work within communities. Should proposals be agreed by the Fire Authority, impacted staff members will be individually consulted with. It is anticipated that most of the staff change can be achieved via natural turnover. If this is not the case redeployment options will be considered prior to any voluntary or compulsory redundancy.
<b>Strategic Policy Links &amp; Core Code of Ethics</b> (Identify how proposals link with current priorities & policy framework and align to the Core Code of Ethics)	The Resource Review links to both the Response and Prevention strategies. It has been undertaken with the Core Code of Ethics in mind, particularly Putting Our Communities First.

<p><b>Risk Management / Health &amp; Safety</b> (identify any risks, the proposed control measures, and risk evaluation scores).</p>	<p>The Resource Review is different to a Community Risk Management Plan. The proposals outlined in the review do not pose an increased risk to the public – no fire stations are being closed.</p>
<p><b>Consultation</b> (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)</p>	<p>Public and staff consultation has been undertaken on the proposals outlined in the review.</p>
<p><b>Equalities</b> (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)</p>	<p>A People Impact Assessment has been undertaken on the proposals.</p>
<p><b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b> (where personal data is processed a DPIA must be completed to ensure compliant handling)</p>	<p>Our research partners complied with data protection rules and regulations.</p>

### **Background papers**

Appendix A – Resource Review Consultation 2024 (separate enclosure)

Appendix B – Resource Review – Post Consultation Amendments June 2024

Appendix C – Resource Review (separate enclosure)