

## **Report of Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive**

### **Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive Appointment – Options Analysis**

#### **Purpose of report**

1. To commence the process of succession planning for the current postholder and provide the Fire Authority with an options analysis for the appointment of a new Chief Officer / Chief Executive, with a view to recommending the best option that most effectively meets both the current and likely future challenges and needs facing the Fire Authority over the medium term.
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#### **Recommendations**

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

- i) the Fire Authority agrees to appoint a substantive operational Chief Fire Officer in succession to the current postholder;
- ii) the Appointments Committee commence a recruitment process as soon as possible;
- iii) there be no change to the remuneration package of the Chief Officer post at this time;
- iv) the Fire Authority maintains the flexibility to accommodate potential candidates' personal circumstances (e.g. home location within an approved area outside of the two county boundaries).

#### **Introduction and Background**

2. Since the appointment of the current Chief Fire Officer in 2016, the Service has undergone significant changes, as a result of both internal factors and external drivers and influences. For example, organisationally, the Service has had to manage significant reductions in 'real-terms' finances; legal challenges to pension changes; government reform of the fire sector; introduction of HMI inspections; large-scale retirement of Full-time firefighters coupled with the increasing challenges of recruiting and retaining On-Call firefighters; resetting of the Service's culture and values; the on-going modernisation and rationalisation of the Service's estate; a developing alliance with Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service - and a drawn out and disputed bid for governance change. Operationally, the knock-on impacts to the Service of both the Grenfell Tower fire and the Manchester Arena bombing are still to be fully determined, whilst wide-area flooding and the Covid-19 pandemic have dominated the Service's work activities throughout 2020 to the present.
3. Going into 2020, however, thanks to the difficult but necessary decisions made by the Fire Authority over the last four years, the Service now has the strong foundations of a sustainable medium-term financial plan (unless government

choose to change the financial 'goalposts' significantly); efficient, effective and well-supported frontline and back-office functions; a 'can-do' culture and a professional workforce who have pride in and ownership of working for the Service; a collaborative and flexible approach that looks to work with partners in order to add more value to local communities – and a growing ambition to do even more. The 2021-2025 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) clearly sets out the journey that the Service has been on and its ambition and vision for the future. And although the Service still has some way to go to achieve its ambitions in full, the positive impact of dedicated organisational and political leadership throughout these last few years should not be underestimated. Therefore, it is within this context that the following options are presented.

4. As a consequence of both the national and local contexts, the Fire Authority now has a number of options to consider in terms of how it best moves forward with its soon-to-be vacant Chief Officer / Chief Executive position, following the planned retirement of its Chief Fire Officer early next year.

#### **Current and Medium-Term Operating Context – Key Drivers:**

5. In order to best determine both the appropriateness and suitability of each potential option, it is important first for the Fire Authority to consider the main driving factors within the current and most likely future operating environment of HWFRS. These are as follows:

#### **6. Duty to Collaborate/Governance Change**

- 6.1. The introduction of the Policing & Crime Act in 2017 formalised the requirement for closer working between FRS's and most notably the Police. At a local level, HWFRS already has strong and well-established collaborative working relationships with both Shropshire FRS (SFRS) and West Mercia Police (WMP) as well as with other public sector partners across the two counties and with neighbouring FRS's. HWFRS has championed a collaborative approach for many years now and, as a result, can evidence a number of important examples of positive collaborative work and projects (both delivered and planned).
- 6.2. In the West Mercia area, the legislation also resulted in bid back in 2017 by the current Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to take over governance of the two fire & rescue services, based on a business case predicated on delivering substantial financial savings (estimated at being upto £4m per annum), which was to be achieved primarily by absorbing the back-office and ICT functions of the smaller organisations (i.e. fire & rescue services) into the larger entity at the time (i.e. the merged support functions of West Mercia and Warwickshire police services) - as well as the merger of the two Fire Control Rooms, the rationalisation of senior management posts across both fire services, sharing premises between Fire & Police and reducing the overheads / expenses of the two current Fire Authorities as a result of their dissolution.
- 6.3. During the research and consultation phases of the business case, both Chief Fire Officers and their respective Fire Authorities expressed concerns about the

potentially detrimental impact and efficacy of the proposals on the quality of services they currently deliver – particularly the theoretical absorption of back-office & ICT functions, as well as the financially focussed, cost-reducing merger of the two Control Room functions. Furthermore, as the disputed bid has been drawn out for more than two years now (due to the legal challenges of the two Fire Authorities and most recently the intervention by the Policing minister (June 2020) to ask for a review of the current business case and to delay any decision on governance until after the May 2021 PPC election) it is appropriate to reconsider the impact and efficacy of the business case set against the changing operating context of both the respective Police and Fire Alliances, as well as the impact of the Grenfell Tower fire, the Manchester Arena bombing, the severity and frequency of extreme weather events and the Covid-19 pandemic.

- 6.4. Furthermore, if the current PCC is not re-elected in May next year, then this would potentially leave a business case lodged with the Home Office that no longer has a local political sponsor. If this occurs, there may be an expectation from central government that the existing Fire Authorities should deliver the business case instead. If this was the case, the Fire Authorities would need to provide suitable evidence that implementing the business case was (or was not) in the best interests of either local communities and/or the two Fire & Rescue Services.

## **7. Breakdown of Police Alliance**

- 7.1. According to the Office of the PCC (OPCC), the breaking up of the strategic alliance between West Mercia Police and Warkwickshire Police will continue to have a significant impacts on both organisations' Enabling and ICT Services for at least 18 months, if not longer (see '*PCC submission report to Worcestershire County Council June 2020 – End of the Strategic Policing Alliance – Update Report*' – para 28 p4-5). As a consequence, these changes will have a significant draw on the resources and time of both the OPCC's and WMP's management teams across the affected functions for many months, if not years.
- 7.2. Furthermore, at the start of this redesign phase, no mention or approach has been made by WMP to collaborate and understand the needs of HWFRS in these areas, which only suggests that the redesign will be undertaken exclusively to meet the needs of WMP.
- 7.3. Therefore, ensuring the appropriate, fair and effective management of HWFRS funding and resources throughout any period of potential collaborative change of this nature is vitally important.

## **8. Strategic Fire Alliance**

- 8.1. In 2018, the two Fire Authorities approved a formal alliance between HWFRS and Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service (SFRS). The primary aim of the alliance being to improve capacity and resilience across the two services in order to best utilise their finite resources. In the preceding five years or more before the alliance, both services had already spent considerable time and effort making

both their frontline and back-office functions significantly more efficient and effective to meet their specific needs. Furthermore, the Manchester Arena bombing (May 2017) and the Grenfell Tower fire (June 2017) became two key drivers (for both change and investment) that needed to be considered when forming the Fire Alliance. Grenfell Tower is mentioned in the PCC business case (see below), but its implications, at the time, were not considered as being material to the savings that were attributable to the business case proposals.

#### **Extract from PCC Full Business Case – Page 17**

##### **The impact of the Grenfell Tower Fire**

3.2.14. It is suggested that the inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire will not have a direct impact on proposals for governance because changes in governance do not, by themselves, result in changes in service delivery. Changes to service delivery that result from the Grenfell inquiry will apply regardless of governance models and will need to be implemented by the fire and rescue services not by the governing body. The focus will remain on public safety.

3.2.15. The focus of the inquiry is on fire safety in multi-occupancy high-rise buildings. There are few of these in West Mercia. It is possible that the inquiry could lead to increased, unfunded responsibilities for fire and rescue services through new regulation. It is the contention of this FBC that the proposed change in governance and ensuing increase in collaboration will make West Mercia more able to implement any such requirements. This will be achieved through closer working between HWFRS and SWFRS, particularly the development and implementation of policy, training and expertise, and through the economic benefits that will result from the change in governance and from increased collaboration.

- 8.2. However, what is now apparent is that both events will have much more widespread consequences to fire and rescue services – operationally, financially, functionally, collaboratively and in relation to a number of their key ICT systems – which means the savings attributed to areas such as ICT and enabling services in the PCC business case, as well as the control room merger, need to be significantly reassessed. It also means HWFRS will require clear and strong leadership to ensure the Service's interests are both heard and taken into account in these matters both before and after any final decision is made in respect to future governance arrangements.

#### **9. Covid 19, Brexit, Future Government Funding for the Fire Sector**

- 9.1. The financial and organisational impact of all of these areas are, as yet unknown. It is important, therefore, that HWFRS maintains strong leadership to ensure its interests are promoted and protected, irrespective of potential future changes to governance.

#### **10. Employee Relations / FBU Pay Claim**

- 10.1. With the recent announcement of a FBU pay claim of circa 12.5% minimum, there is an increased potential of national industrial action being called to further that claim in the foreseeable future. Any industrial action will have a significant impact on the capacity of the respective senior management teams across both HWFRS and SFRS.

## **11. Staff Morale and Motivation**

- 11.1. One of HWFRS key strengths in the last five years has been its workforce's ability to maintain responsive and professional prevention, protection and emergency response services for the communities of Herefordshire and Worcestershire, whilst at the same time managing significant changes to the way it works, as well as how it is structured and resourced. This has resulted in a number of difficult decisions being made by the Fire Authority, which have been successfully implemented by HWFRS managers, led by SMB and the Chief Fire Officer. As these changes are embedded and the Service begins to stabilise, it will be imperative for HWFRS to maintain its approach of constructive engagement with the workforce – providing strong leadership, empathy and motivation during a further period of potential uncertainty and change.

### **Corporate Considerations - Appointment Options:**

12. Taking into account the operating environment and key drivers highlighted above, the main appointment options for the new Chief Officer are set out below, with commentary on the respective advantages and disadvantages of each option:

#### **Option 1- Chief Fire Officer (with requisite operational command and strategic Fire Service management experience) – also acting as Chief Executive for the Fire Authority:**

##### **Advantages**

- Maintains the strategic Fire Sector experience and understanding of the current operating context (including wider UK Fire & Rescue Service / central government network experience) – particularly in relation to government's Fire Service Reform agenda, HMICFRS, Grenfell Tower fire and the Manchester Arena bombing.
- With the potential to rationalise senior management posts across the two fire services in the future, and the continuing need for strategic operational management (for example, in the face of recent extreme weather events and the Covid-19 pandemic), operational competence at this level is identified as an essential within a small management cadre.
- Allows HWFRS to continue to contribute towards national FRS work streams, allowing the organisation to remain well-informed of national initiatives and direction, as well as maintaining the development of the Service's strong reputation within the national FRS arena.
- Provides the security of leadership over the medium term compared to temporary or fixed term options – whilst still allowing for assimilation into any changed management structures that may be brought about by governance change. In addition, if the case for governance change is eventually ratified and implemented by government, the PCC has already acknowledged the need to retain senior management capacity for a period

post-transition, in order to assist in implementing any changes that may be forthcoming.

- Offers the Fire Authority their own professional adviser who can lead and negotiate on their behalf during a period of potentially significant change both locally and nationally, with the background of having significant previous experience of collaborative working with other blue light services.
- Demonstrates to local communities and staff the commitment of the Fire Authority to the organisation in its current form whilst the longer term direction of the organisation is developed.
- Ensures the principal officer operational rota is maintained without having to increase the operational establishment – as well as maintaining the senior operational command resilience required to effectively manage protracted and large scale incidents, such as wide-area flooding or Covid-19.
- Provides potential appointees with a role that offers them the main achievement of their career goals.

#### Disadvantages

- In the short term, it may limit the scope for immediately reducing a senior management post following a change of governance.

### **Option 2 - Chief Executive (without operational command or previous strategic Fire Service management experience)**

#### Advantages

- Offers the potential for a wider range of applicants across both the public and private sectors, bringing with them specific expertise in areas such as change management, mergers and private sector management approaches.
- Provides potential security of leadership over the medium term compared to temporary or fixed term options, although this may not be realised, if the successful candidate views the appointment as a short term opportunity within a wider ranging career.

#### Disadvantages

- Successful candidate could lack UK Fire Sector experience at a period of significant change.
- Local communities and staff could raise concerns over the future direction of the Service, dependent on the previous roles / experience of the appointee. This could send the wrong message to those key stakeholders at a time of significant change and challenge.
- There could be a need to establish a separate senior command role in addition to the Chief Executive post, in order to effectively maintain the operational Principal Officer command rota, particularly in light of more

recent experience regarding extreme weather events and Covid-19 strategic level response.

- Successful candidate could potentially need to quickly develop UK Fire Service / central government network relationships and experience, during a time of significant change and challenge in the sector – particularly in relation to the Grenfell Tower fire and Manchester Arena bombing inquiry findings.

### **Option 3 - Joint Chief Officer or Joint Chief Executive:**

#### **Advantages**

- Potential to put in place one Head of Paid Service over at least two organisations, signalling the intended direction of both organisations to join up in the medium-term.
- Potential to gain support from central government due to the approach being in line with current government thinking.
- Savings in annual salary and associated costs (albeit these could be less than expected if operational command rotas need to be added to in order to maintain command group levels).

#### **Disadvantages**

- Sharing of such a key senior position would need to follow the strategic mandate and direction of the Fire Authority and at least one other partner to change the structure and identities of both their Services. For this to be a viable option, therefore, the strategic joint direction of both organisations would need to be well defined and signed up to by both parties (such as the clear intention for a more fundamental alliance or merger in the foreseeable future). With no such local political agreement envisaged in the short term between the Fire Authority and either another neighbouring Fire Authority (i.e. SFRS) and/or the local PCC (and the further uncertainty surrounding the latter due to the Home Office instigated review of the business case), the reality of progressing with a joint post would be seen as a high risk option, although this risk may be mitigated by the use of a fixed term temporary option first (see below), in order to help manage the organisational and political transitions.

#### **Option 4 - Fixed Term Temporary Chief Fire Officer or Chief Executive:**

##### **Advantages**

- Leaves the Fire Authority with the option to lose / consolidate the Chief Officer or Chief Executive role within a short time period, dependent on the future direction of the organisation regarding collaborative working, merger and / or changes in governance arrangements.
- Potential to save future redundancy costs if consolidation route was taken.
- This option also has the potential to work with the Joint Chief Officer / Chief Executive option, at a later date, if managed appropriately.

##### **Disadvantages**

- Potential for appointee to view the role as a short term opportunity only and move on before any future direction is established and implemented – which runs the risk of the interests of the Service not being effectively represented and protected.
- Potential difficulties in recruitment (due to the temporary nature of the post), which could have the knock-on effect of putting the Fire Authority in a weak position in terms of future discussions / negotiations with potential partners and/or the PCC.
- Timings and nature of any future organisational direction – being dependent on multiple factors and a number of other organisations' priorities – could mean the fixed-term approach would not line up with either the political and/or organisational timetable that could be practically delivered.
- Does not provide the security of leadership over the medium term compared to permanent appointment options.

#### **Conclusion**

13. Taking into account the need to maintain strong leadership of the Service, the complexity and uncertainty of the current operating environment, the key drivers and the advantages/disadvantages of the main options highlighted above, this report recommends the Fire Authority to seek the permanent appointment of a new Chief Fire Officer with the requisite operational command and strategic Fire Service management experience (Option 1) in succession to the current postholder whose retirement is planned for early 2021.
14. This would provide the Fire Authority with the best mixture of experience, leadership and capability to effectively manage the Service over the medium term, whilst at the same time, providing it with a suitably experienced professional adviser during a period of potential further significant change in the local and national operating contexts.
15. However, it is recognised that attracting suitable candidates may be difficult, due to the factors highlighted above. In order to mitigate these, it is also



recommended that the Fire Authority maintains the flexibility to accommodate potential candidates' personal circumstances (e.g. home location within an approved area outside of the two county boundaries)

### Corporate Considerations

<b>Resource Implications</b> (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	Previously identified resources to undertake selection and recruitment process
<b>Strategic Policy Links</b> (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	The commitment to having the right people, with the right skills and training is part our vision and mission.
<b>Risk Management / Health &amp; Safety</b> (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	None
<b>Consultation</b> (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	N/A
<b>Equalities</b> (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	The recruitment and selection process will be a fair process and will take equalities issues into account