

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Update on progress with the Invest to Improve programme

Purpose of Report

1. This report is intended to update Members of the Committee on the progress being made following the release of funding from strategic reserves in June 2021 to make long term improvements in some key elements of core service delivery and infrastructure.
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Recommendation

It is recommended that the schemes identified within the Invest to Improve programme and progress to date, be noted.

Introduction and Background

2. In June 2021 the Fire Authority agreed to release funding through restructuring of reserves and utilising other available funding to support a programme of investment across the Service. The purpose of this was to ensure a number of key projects could be completed, to initiate improvements in several key areas and ensure that investment to underpin a broad range of capital and revenue based improvements could be realised over the next three to four years, aligned to the core strategic objectives.

Progress

3. Detailed below is a summary of some key areas of development (not definitive):
4. A new incident command suite has now been completed in Worcester which will provide vastly improved technology and training both on site and remotely to all locations. This facility is undergoing commissioning in the New Year.
5. Funding has been allocated to a three year project to improve marketing and recruitment for on-call staff at all 25 operational locations. This project will also drive improvements in diversity, in particular recruiting female staff, but also new staff from a range of backgrounds. This project has now been scoped out and it is anticipated that by Spring (2022), the delivery team will be formed and begin to deliver support for on-call recruitment targeted at those stations most in need initially.
6. The digital transformation required to provide new training packages and technology to enable instructors to deliver training for operational staff aligned to

National Operational Guidance is being developed. Funding has been allocated to provide all staff with fully interactive on-line tutorial and assessment packages. This will replace the current PowerPoint style packages which need to be delivered manually and in the workplace each year. The new style training packages can be accessed remotely and on personal devices making it easier for all staff to train from any location or at home. Initial prototype packages have now been developed and changes to training staffing are being finalised to ensure these new packages can be built, updated and maintained in the future.

7. Introduction of a new system for tracking, testing and tracing equipment. The current system is now aging and relies on serial numbers on each item of equipment (around 16,000 items) to be manually recorded and inputted into a database when, used, tested or moved. A new system is being researched which will automate this function to a large degree and allow items of equipment to be electronically tagged. Once implemented this project will ultimately realise significant capacity benefits for the wider workforce leaving more staff time available for prevention activities, and operational training.
8. Fire investigation: A joint project with Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service, monitored through the Strategic Alliance Programme, is aiming to deliver a joint solution (with West Mercia Police) to align Fire Service staff to new regulations in regard to becoming approved and qualified fire investigation specialists for criminal investigations. This project is being led by HWFRS on behalf of both Services and is making good progress. This will also provide conformity with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) framework and provides resilience across the Alliance, driving future effectiveness and efficiency.
9. There is a need to digitise and reshape how the Service uses corporate (external) and managerial (internal) communications, by utilising and enhancing the new technology that has proven to be effective during the Covid pandemic. The Service has carried out a selection process and identified a digital marketing consultancy company to review our current, and future internal and external needs. The research, when completed, will provide a delivery plan for what is needed in terms of technology, messaging, transmission routes, absorption rates, perceptions and feedback. This also aligns to areas identified by the Inspectorate (HMICFRS), with regards to leadership, visibility of senior managers and how we gather and use staff feedback more effectively.
10. Some of the approved funding has been allocated to underpin and support capital projects such as the completion of the final strategic training facility in north Herefordshire, at Leominster Police Station. It is anticipated that the new training facility will go live in late 2022/23.
11. Funding has also been made available to develop and improve both the Prevention and Protection functions. This project is currently being scoped out and will drive improvements in technology to help handle, manage and utilise data better to underpin targeting and evaluation of Prevention work. It will also ensure that Protection work is also seamlessly transitioned into the Response 'Intel' database to improve operational responder knowledge and risk information. A new Intel risk information database is also required and built into the Invest to Improve programme.

12. Additional funding has also been provided to ensure that the ambitious Protection (Fire Safety) training programme is fully funded to realise and drive higher skill and knowledge levels across all operational staff. Succession planning and training for certain key specialist posts is also included within this project. The requirement to undertake this work is aligned to national expectations, through NFCC, and the HMICFRS that have emerged as a result of the Grenfell Tower tragedy.
13. Funding will also be allocated to underpin the Services Environmental and Sustainability (5 year) Plan, however due to a staffing shortage this has been delayed and the funding requirement is not established. It is anticipated that a new Estates Manager post will be recruited into in Spring 2022, which will drive this piece of work forward.

Conclusion

14. The Invest to Improve programme is ambitious, wide ranging and not yet fully formed in some areas. The Senior Management Board (SMB) aims to review the programme in the New Year and target how to further develop and resource these key workstreams.
15. A number of key areas are already in progress and outlined in this report. However, due to staffing issues and with new members in post at SMB and middle management levels it has taken longer than hoped to initiate some projects. Additionally, it has been important to engage and consult with the workforce, and ensure that the programme is built progressively, so it is owned and developed by the wider management team and workforce.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	Identified in core funding and release of reserves see Appendix 1 and Treasurer's regular update to Authority on MTFP.
Strategic Policy Links (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	This paper links to all core strategies and enabling strategies alongside MTFP & CRMP.
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	Not applicable at this stage.

Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	Formal consultation not required, however informal consultation has taken place with staff, managers and trade unions.
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	Equalities impact assessments will normally be undertaken as each element of this programme develops.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – HWFA Reserves