

REPORT TO NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL AVON FIRE AUTHORITY Meeting 4th October

Held at Police & Fire Headquarters, Portishead

- 1 Apologies for Absence
- 2 Emergency Evacuation Procedures
- 3 Declaration of Interests
- 4 Public Access
- 5 Chair's Business
- 6 Minutes of the Avon Fire Authority
- 6.1 Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Avon Fire Authority held on 21 June 2023
- 7 Minutes of Committee Meetings
- 7.1 Ordinary Meeting of the Local Pension Board held on 15 February 2023
- 7.2 Ordinary Minutes of the People & Culture Meeting held on 3 March 2023
- 7.3 Ordinary Minutes of the Audit, Governance and Ethics Meeting held on 22 March 2023
- 7.4 Ordinary Minutes of the Performance, Review and Scrutiny Meeting held on 20 April 2023
- 8 Budget Shortfall Options
- 9 Adoption of LGA Cllr Model Code of Conduct
- 10 Extension of Independent Person Appointment
- 11 Date of next Meeting – 16th February 2024
- 12 Exclusion of the Press and Public
- 13.1 Confidential Minutes of the Ordinary People and Culture Meeting held on 3 March 2023
- 13.2 Confidential Minutes of the Ordinary Audit, Governance & Ethics Committee held on 22 March 2023

In May 2023 the Chief Fire Officer commissioned a project to identify efficiencies to address the savings required to meet forecast funding pressures in the Medium-Term Financial Plan and maintain a balanced budget. Funding pressures became known following the confirmation of the Grey Book (uniformed) pay award and uncertain future funding settlements for 2024/25 onwards. The project objective was to maintain or improve Service Delivery by not closing Stations or reducing the number of appliances to ensure an improved service to our communities, while continuing to invest in making the service stronger and keeping our communities safe. Key areas of focus have been crewing models on wholetime stations, the introduction of a blended fleet and reinvestment for an Alarm Response Vehicle. The Efficiency Project has identified a potential £2 million worth of recurrent annual efficiency savings by 2026/27. The Project Team has identified that efficiencies can be achieved through natural retirement profiles, but not all efficiencies will be realised in year one due to the current retirement profile of the Service. However, over years two and three all potential efficiencies are projected to be achieved.

The Fire Authority was asked to:

- a) Approve a crewing model of 4 personnel on every pumping appliance at wholetime stations. Crewing will be maintained at 5 at Hicks Gate, Bristol, where we have Key Point Indicators (KPIs) for National Resilience.
- b) Approve a flexible crewing model for Yate wholetime personnel whilst ensuring 4 personnel on the wholetime appliance to maintain a day crewed model.
- c) Approve the introduction of an Alarm Response Vehicle to create capacity for wholetime crews to be more productive in protection and prevention activities.
- d) Approve implementation of a smaller response vehicle for lower category, non-life critical incidents.

A four-year MTFP was presented for approval at the Fire Authority meeting in February. The plan covered 2023/24 - 26/27 and highlighted the following incremental shortfalls in the revenue budget projections (noting a balanced position for 2023/24 and therefore no shortfalls in the first year of the plan):

- a) 2024/25 £1 million
- b) 2025/26 £0.4 million (additional to prior year shortfall)
- c) 2026/27 £0.5 million (additional to prior years shortfall).

This translates to the following annual shortfalls for each financial year:

- a) 2024/25 £1 million b) 2025/26 £1.4 million c) 2026/27 £1.9 million.

For the 2023/24 financial year the Service has been able to present a balanced budget due to the £5 Council Tax precept settlement. For future years there is uncertainty around the funding settlements and therefore a prudent assumption of a 1.99% increase per annum was modelled.

When choosing to opt for the £5 increase in the Council Tax precept, services were also requested to indicate to the Home Office and the Fire Minister where further efficiencies could be made to increase the effectiveness and productivity of service provision. His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection criteria also covers effective use of resources for prevention, protection, and response.

In addition to the shortfalls identified above, AF&RS is looking to generate a further £600,000 across the three-year period to allow for a contribution from the revenue budget to earmarked Capital Reserves.

The recommendations anticipated a reduction in full-time operational establishment by 40 posts, realising an annualised saving of £2m. This figure includes salary savings, along with national insurance and pension contributions.

The savings would not all be achieved in the first year of implementation, as the plan is to reduce the establishment naturally via retirements. The Service therefore needs to achieve the retirement assumptions made to avoid any further impacts on its people. However, it is recognised there will be a short-term impact on recruitment and the Service will manage vacancies through existing succession planning.

£885,000 of additional savings will be generated over three financial years to reinvest into the implementation of an Alarm Response Vehicle, this will support the blended fleet model for response. This vehicle will respond to Automatic Fire Alarms and work with local businesses to reduce the impact of Automatic Fire Alarms and free up other appliances which can be committed to other activity for prevention, protection and response. Purchase of an Alarm Response Vehicle assumed at £50,000 cost within 2025/26 financial year. Three additional roles to crew this vehicle is assumed at £51,000 p.a. cost per role and that all three staff are in place for the start of the 2025/26 financial year.

If no further savings were identified the Service would be able to contribute £529,000 to the Capital Reserve, rather than the desired £600,000. The numbers assume the purchase of any required blended fleet appliance is covered by the existing Capital Programme. This also assumes there would be no change to the ongoing fleet maintenance costs in the revenue budget as a result of the investment in a blended fleet appliance.

Option Appraisal

Crewing model of 4 on every Wholetime Appliance.

AF&RS's current crewing model is 4 on every water tender and 5 on every water tender ladder. This option would ensure the service meets and maintains its response standards as detailed in the Service Plan. All On Call appliances would still be utilised with a maximum of 5 riders on the appliance. It would mean a reduction in 28 posts and would create efficiencies of £1.4m.

Flexible crewing at Yate wholetime.

Allows for wholetime crews at Yate to use a self-rostering system, ensuring a crewing model of 4 at all times. It would mean a reduction in 4 posts and creates a saving of £206,000.

Smaller vehicle / blended fleet at a multi pump station in the Bristol area.

The blended fleet vehicle would be a smaller/midi type fire appliance that allows the crew of a multi pump station to dynamically mobilise depending on the type of incident they are required to attend. Risk analysis is currently taking place to identify the best location for this type of vehicle to be located. Initial indications are that the risk area would be within the Bristol area. The blended fleet vehicle would be mobilised as a single vehicle to non-life critical, lower category incidents and would create capacity for operational crews to complete more Prevention and Protection activity. Means a reduction in 8 posts and efficiencies of £412,000.

Removing Primary crewing of the Aerial appliance at 09 Temple.

The current crewing model of the Aerial appliance of 09 Temple is primary crewed, meaning 2 Firefighters crew this appliance every shift. A secondary crewing model was considered which would mean no dedicated crew until an incident arises. The savings if this crewing model was adopted is £620,000 per year and would mean a reduction in 12 Firefighter posts. The appliance is currently widely utilised and is in Central Bristol, where most of the Tall Buildings are located. This option had been rejected because research, risk data and mapping highlighted that the current crewing model matches the Services resource to risk profile.

Changing ridership factor from 1.37 to 1.2.

A ridership factor is a figure used to ensure optimal crewing on each watch. The savings if the ridership factor was reduced to 1.2 would be £1.9m per year and would mean a reduction in 38 Firefighter posts. This option had been rejected because it could lead to an increase in the overtime budget, as there may be crewing deficiencies due to resilience of each watch.

A crewing model of 4 on every Wholetime Appliance, with flexible crewing at Yate wholetime and smaller vehicle (blended fleet) option on a multi pump station.

A combination of these three options would create efficiencies of £2m.

It was projected that a crewing model of 4 on every appliance and a blended fleet vehicle would also allow for reinvestment. Risk mapping identifies that an Alarm Response Vehicle that responds to Automated Fire Alarms could be located in the Bristol area and operated during normal business hours. This would be crewed by either Business Fire Safety qualified staff and / or operational staff. Capacity on wholetime shifts would be enhanced with the introduction of this vehicle as it would mean a standard appliance does not attend the majority of alarm calls and the crews will have capacity in being more productive in Prevention and Protection activities. This aligns with NFCC productivity and capacity work stream.

The Fire Brigades Union delegation spokesperson outlined their concerns with the recommendations to members, stating that these would lead to a reduction in safety standards to the public and fire crews. Currently the fifth crew member monitors breathing apparatus and it was felt that the 4-crewing model would compromise this vital role.

The recommendations were passed by Authority members by 16 votes to 2.