



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Annual Report to Herefordshire Council

25 September 2015

Authority Chairman and Vice-Chairman 2014/15

1. Councillor D W Prodger MBE, from Worcestershire County Council, was re-elected as Chairman of the Authority and Councillor R J Phillips, was elected as Vice-Chairman.

Financial Information

2. The final out-turn position for 2014/15 is an under-spend of £2.534m, which was an increase of £1.679m since the third quarter. This additional under-spend is almost entirely down to one-off items: reduced operational activity, incomplete training due to industrial action, back dated business rate refunds, delayed equipment delivery, additional secondment income and non-allocated inflation and support staff pay award provisions.
3. In addition to the £0.705m already approved for transfer to the budget reduction reserve to support the staff reduction profile, the Authority approved the transfer of £0.300m to the Operational Activity Reserve and £0.300m to an ear-marked reserve for late equipment delivery. A transfer of the balance of £1.229m to a temporary earmarked reserve was approved.
4. The total approved capital budget for 2014/15 was revised to £6.773m at the February Authority meeting. Against this revised budget, expenditure of £4.779m (71%) has been incurred, an under spending of £1.994m. The Authority agreed the re-phasing of capital budgets to 2015/16.
5. The Authority's finances are well controlled and despite a relatively small number of late one-off items, the resultant under spending is part of a planned response to known future budget constraints.

Performance 2014/15

6. The Authority recently noted the following headlines in relation to annual performance for 2014-15:

- i) the total number of incidents attended in 2014-15 is the lowest overall total in the nine years that the current data set has been collected. It is also the lowest number of incidents for each of the three main categories of incidents individually;
- ii) sickness levels for all staff continue to remain within tolerance and are comparable with 2013-14; the sickness levels are some of the lowest in the country when compared to other Fire and Rescue Services and compare very favourably with local authorities.
- iii) the Service saw a 6.5% increase in attendances at building fires that met the 10 minutes attendance standard, compared with the same period last year; and
- iv) retained (on-call) first appliances were available for operational duty 94.3% of the time.

Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2014-2020

- 7. As part of the Community Risk Management Plan the second fire engines at Ledbury and Tenbury fire stations were removed from the Service's fleet of fire engines. However there were no changes to the existing fire engines at Bewdley, Broadway, Whitchurch and Kingsland and no change to the second fire engines at Kidderminster, Evesham, Leominster, Bromyard and Ross-on-Wye.
- 8. The Authority instructed officers to investigate the feasibility of introducing the new shift system, Day Crewing Plus, for the second wholetime fire engines at Hereford and at Worcester. In February 2015 a two year trial period of the Day Crewing Plus duty system for the second fire engines at Hereford and at Worcester and the associated costs was approved.
- 9. The CRMP can be found on the service website at www.hwfire.org.uk/your-right-to-know/our-publications/

New Fire Station for Hereford

- 10. In 2011, the Authority authorised the replacement of five fire stations which had been highlighted as a priority for replacement following extensive condition surveys which demonstrated that the maintenance profile of these buildings was such that it would be uneconomic to repair them.
- 11. The fire station replacement programme included a new building in Hereford where the current fire station is beyond its service life, with very poor welfare facilities and limited training facilities. It was hoped that a potential new location

could be secured at a council owned site in Bath Street, but this proved not to be a viable option.

12. As the Service has aligned its fire station replacement programme with the Police through closer collaboration, a new location in Edgar Street is now being explored with a commitment that the Police will investigate the potential to accommodate staff and resources on a shared basis.

Collaboration with the Police

13. In October 2014, the Authority received a total of £4.27 million from the government's Transformation Fund to fund the following two projects:

- a. Move the Fire Service Headquarters from its present location on the outskirts of Worcester to join West Mercia Police at their headquarters at Hindlip near Worcester;

Transformation Fund award: £1.89 million received

- b. Create a new Wyre Forest Blue Light Hub in Worcestershire which relocates the existing three fire stations in the Wyre Forest area into a new purpose-built, centrally located station;

Transformation Fund award: £2.38 million received.

14. Due to the potential of the Wyre Forest Blue Light Hub to involve the relocation of three existing fire stations into a single, central hub and co-location of multiple partners (West Mercia Police, West Midlands Ambulance Service, Severn Area Rescue Association and the British Red Cross) the Authority recently approved a public consultation programme prior to consideration of the final proposals by the Authority early next year.

Closer Working with Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service

15. Collaboration already exists between the two Fire and Rescue Services, notable in areas such as operational cover, water rescue and training. However, a joint officer team (Project Arrow) was established with Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service to examine the potential benefits to be delivered from 2017 and beyond. A number of further opportunities for operational collaboration were identified including the alignment of policy, procedure, systems, processes, equipment and best practice in departments such as Operational Support, Health and Safety, Technical Services, Training and Development, Prevention and Protection, and Response.

16. The Authority has agreed that the Project Team and the Joint Project Board (comprising officers and Members of both authorities) maintain their connection and that the collaborative work continues with a focus on achieving operational collaboration and strategic alliance light by late 2015 under the direction of the Joint Project Board. [Strategic alliance light is where decision making is retained by each authority but there is formal agreement between the two organisations, which umbrellas a number of operational collaborations between workstreams and/or structural changes to departments.]
17. The Authority has also agreed that work to date is shared with other key partners, notably Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service, West Mercia Police and Warwickshire Police with the aim of stimulating interest in wider collaboration. A further report will be submitted to the Joint Project Board.

Place Partnership Ltd.

18. The Service has transferred its property team into Place Partnerships Limited, a company wholly owned by six public sector partners. This new organisation will provide cost savings through reducing duplication of activity and will coordinate locality reviews which will propose more efficient use of publicly owned property at specific locations. The Service's Asset Management Strategy will be aligned with the other partners and will inform the locality reviews.
19. The Chief Fire Officer will sit on the board of Place Partnership Ltd and the Authority will be represented by the Chairman of the FRA at shareholder level, alongside representatives from Warwickshire and West Mercia Police, Redditch Borough Council, Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council. The Managing Director was appointed in May 2015 and staff transfer commenced on 1 September 2015.

Strike Action

20. As Members will be aware, the Fire Brigades Union has an on-going dispute with Government over pensions. To date there have been 50 periods of industrial action, the latest period being held on 25-26 February 2015. Contingency arrangements have been successfully implemented and continue to provide a robust plan during all periods of strike action.

Members' Allowances

21. Members have voted not to increase their allowances and kept them pegged to those paid in 2009/2010.

Authority Plan 2015/16

22. The Authority's Annual Plan for 2015/16 was approved for publication and is available on the Service's website at www.hwfire.org.uk/your-right-to-know/our-publications/

External Audit Opinion and Financial Statements

23. The External Auditors issued an unqualified opinion on the Authority's 2013/14 financial statements and an unqualified Value for Money Conclusion on 29 September 2014. It is expected that they will do the same in respect of the 2014/15 financial statements on 28th September 2015.

Cllr R J Phillips

Vice-Chairman – Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

FURTHER INFORMATION

Any person wishing to seek further information on this report should contact Committee & Members' Services on 01905 368209. Further information on the Fire Authority and the Fire and Rescue Service can also be found on the website at (www.hwfire.org.uk)