Technical Collaboration Funding

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1   Purpose of Report

This report provides information in support of a request for funding for further technical development and collaborative work with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS).

2   Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to approve the transfer of £262,000 from the 2016/17 General Reserve to the Service Transformation Programme staff reserve to support in-house technical development and technical collaboration with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service

3   Background

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) began its Service Transformation Programme in 2012/13 with the creation and implementation of an Information Strategy. What followed was a considerable investment in new technology and ways of working to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

The Transformation Programme followed the Public Value initiative where the Service had sought to reduce the budget to meet reductions in grant funding. The Programme was based on the principle of investing to save, using underspend generated from cutting costs early to save in the longer term as financial pressure was anticipated to grow in future years. This has been an effective strategy and has seen considerable transformation in the use of technology across the Service.

Previous and current phases of the work have been discussed with, and demonstrated to, HWFRS and recently an opportunity has arisen to jointly fund staff to support both transformation agendas. This would enable HWFRS to progress with their technical transformation programme and enable SFRS to continue some technical development by reducing the associated costs and making continued employment of some staff with specialist technical skills possible through to March 2019.

This collaboration would also provide evidence of the Services meeting the legal 'Duty to collaborate' introduced recently in the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

4   Benefits achieved to date by SFRS

Members of the Audit and Performance Management Committee will be familiar with the benefits accrued through the Transformation Programme from the regular reports that Officers present. In summary, a data warehouse was created into which data is imported daily from a range of core systems. This has provided the ability to create a number of 'dashboards' for teams and groups of staff e.g. Area Command and Fire Safety. These dashboards have been developed with the teams as bespoke tools using standard Microsoft software to provide them with key information to monitor and interrogate various aspects of performance.

As well as providing information that was only previously available perhaps a month in arrears, these dashboards have also saved time for the teams. They have access to information that was not previously available, either easily, or at all. This makes management much more targeted and effective. For example providing an ability to predict, rather than react to individual competence needs and staffing deficiencies.

The Service has also invested in the use of SharePoint as the common way to manage documents and information. A staff Portal (intranet) has been in place for two years now and provides a central point of access for all corporate information. All teams, including retained stations have their own sites allowing collaborative work and reducing the vast number of duplicate documents that were previously passed around via email. This has reduced the amount of server space required for data storage, and, along with a move to the cloud-based Microsoft Office 365 has meant that resilience has improved.

Many forms and processes have been automated reducing manual effort and duplication and the Service has invested in other software to enable short routine processes to be automated by existing staff rather than relying on those with enhanced and expensive technical skills.

5 Plans for the future

General

The original Transformation Programme period was 4 years (2012-2016) and this was extended, with the support of the Fire Authority, to March 2017 to continue development planned but not concluded. Over the financial year 2016/17 officers have been scaling back the programme for closedown and a number of specialist staff have now been released.

Unsurprisingly though, as the Service has come to understand and utilise the technology and data available, further opportunities to improve efficiency have been identified. Whilst it is unrealistic to expect to be able to realise all of these in a short period of time, there are a number of developments which will further build on the key tools and provide better value for the investment made to date. For example, an enhanced reporting system would be hugely beneficial to realise the potential of the Appliance Audit tool and the firefighter competence tool, both of which will be key in any future Inspection regime the Home Office may introduce.

Other anticipated development for SFRS includes:

- Retained pay
- Operational debrief processes
- electronic HR Case Management
- electronic appraisal
- new online recruitment system
- Dashboard for Human Resources and Finance
- Portal for Resources and Fleet
- Officers development records (version 2)
- ICT portal

Collaboration with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service

HWFRS have recently begun their technical transformation programme and there have been many discussions between Brigade Managers over the last year about sharing of learning and collaboration in this area. Following those discussions and demonstration of packages developed, Officers have agreed a proposal to jointly utilise the skills and experience of staff within SFRS to develop similar transformation for HWFRS, the cost of which HWFRS will meet. At the same time, this will enable SFRS to retain some staff with specialist technical skills required to maintain and further develop the functionality invested in to date.

SFRS will maintain the employment relationship for affected staff and their time will be allocated/seconded to HWFRS as necessary with HWFRS meeting all reasonable costs for that work. Without this proposal the relevant staff would have had to be released due to insufficient funding.

In brief, the plan is to work on the introduction of SharePoint to HWFRS starting with a single application SFRS have developed and applying this to

HWFRS. A scoping exercise will also be undertaken between the Services lasting 3 months. This will assess the data sets and the viability of creating a new data warehouse with performance dashboards that reflect those already in use in Shropshire. SFRS staff will support HWFRS in the development of SharePoint and the provision of performance information. In time, this could realistically lead to the ability to jointly use Service information and data across all three counties to benchmark performance and improve the service to the public.

6　Financial Implications

The estimated cost for the continued technical work for Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service alone is:

a)　£162,500 to 31 March 2018
b)　£93,000 for April 2018 to 31 March 2019

This is made up of two part time software developers and part allocation of other staff with specialist skills e.g. Business Analysis

The previous paper, on this agenda, has reported a General Fund balance following 2016/17 closedown of £262,000. Members are requested to approve the use of this balance to fund continued work on the Service Transformation programme and collaboration with HWFRS as outlined above.

For clarity, costs for staff and development work allocated to Hereford and Worcester FRS will be met by them. This funding request is for SFRS work only.

7　Legal Comment

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8　Initial Impact Assessment

This report contains merely statements of fact / historical data. An Initial Impact Assessment is not, therefore, required.

9　Equality Impact Assessment

There are no equality or diversity implications arising from this report.
An e-EQIA is not, therefore, required.

10　Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

11　Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.