



**Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service
Efficiency and Productivity Plan 2024/25**



Contents

Introduction	3
Revenue Budget 2024/25	4
Use of Reserves	6
Efficiency Savings	8
Collaboration	11
Asset Management and Use of Technology	12
Procurement	14
Other Efficiencies	15
Productivity Improvements	15
Summary	17
Appendix A – Efficiencies Template	
Appendix B - Efficiencies Identified	

Introduction

The National Framework sets a requirement that Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) produce and publish annual efficiency plans.

The Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire requested that, from 2023/24, FRAs produce plans that not only cover efficiencies, but also their plans for increasing productivity.

As part of the 2021/22 Spending Review, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Local Government Association (LGA) proposed that across Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) in England, the fire and rescue sector could create 2% of non-pay efficiencies and increase productivity by 3% by 2024/25. Fire Productivity and Efficiency Plans will help the NFCC, LGA and Home Office to collate evidence and to assess progress at national level against the agreed targets at a national level.

This plan sets out how Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority has identified efficiencies and productivity improvements to date, and how it proposes to continue with the Service's transformation through investing in technology and service delivery.

Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Fire Authority's medium term financial planning and precept strategy has proved successful over the last ten years. Members have recognised the importance of protecting the base budget into the medium term and using the funding opportunities made available by government to maintain financial resilience. Council tax freeze grants have been rejected in favour of regular income into the future.

These strategies have enabled the Authority to weather austerity and to invest in its assets, by building reserves to fund new buildings, vehicles, and equipment, thereby reducing debt charges into the long term.

Efficiencies have remained very much a part of the Authority's budget setting process and where efficiencies and savings have been identified, they have been diverted to other areas of the budget to improve outcomes for the people of Shropshire.

Revenue Budget 2024/25

The Fire Authority met on 21 February 2024 to approve the precept for 2024/25, after having considered several options, and the short and medium term consequences of these options.

The Service's budget setting process for 2024/25 was preceded by a formal efficiency review, which is detailed later in the plan. This required budget holders to review all areas within their budgets and identify where current activities could be done for less, or new elements could be introduced at no additional cost. The review resulted in a reduction of £210,000 in the revenue budget.

As well as creating a pay and process contingency based on realistic estimates into the medium term, the Authority recognised the requirement for growth and investment in the Service, to deliver its new Community Risk Management Plan and to prepare for technological and operational improvements.

The Authority has a proven history of continuous improvement and sound strategic financial planning, and several strategic reviews have continued since their launch in 2022/23, to identify further technological advantage and improved resource productivity.

- The On Call Sustainability Review has identified ways to further improve and sustain this most efficient method of service delivery.
- The Resources Review forms part of the Service's Community Risk Management Plan which will run from 2025 to 2029 and confirm the most effective and efficient way of matching resources to risk.
- The Efficiency and Productivity Review is underway, with reviews having been carried out across the Service to identify and report efficiencies and value for money, and work commencing on assessing and monitoring productivity in the wholetime duty system.

Despite continued lobbying to the Treasury, the precept referendum limit for the Fire sector for 2024/25 reverted to a maximum increase of 2.99%, one of the lowest within the Local Government Finance Settlement.

After consideration of the consequences of the precept increase options, and the Authority's medium term budget position, the Authority agreed a precept increase of 2.99%, or £3.33. Members noted the continued uncertainty of single year settlements and the increased costs resulting from the 2020 valuation of the Fire pension schemes.

The maximum precept increase will enable the Authority to cover inflationary pressures and prepare for the future, and officers are committed to ensuring that the funds available are used in a way which demonstrates excellent value for money.

The following table sets the Authority's revenue budget for 2024/25 and its sources of funding

Revenue Budget	2024/25 £'000
Pay	
Pay costs	22,295
Other employee costs	449
Total pay	22,744
Non pay	
Premises	1,240
Transport	692
Supplies & services	3,054
Total non pay	4,986
Income	
Income – general	-28
Interest receivable	-220
Govt grants	-48
Total income	-296
Debt charges	
Interest payable	759
MRP	777
Total debt charges	1,536
Transfer to reserves	208
Total Revenue Budget	29,178
Income	2024/25 £'000
Revenue support grant	-2,701
Retained income from Rate Retention Scheme	-4,176
Specific grants	-2,218
Sub total	-9,095
Collection fund surplus	40
Council tax requirement	-20,123
Total Income and Funding	-29,178

Council tax base	175,765
Council tax base growth	1.35%
Band D precept	£114.49
Increase in band D precept	2.99%

Use of Reserves

The Fire Authority's reserves strategy is an integral part of its financial planning and capital strategy.

CIPFA state that when reviewing their medium term financial plans and preparing their annual budgets, local authorities should consider the establishment and maintenance of reserves. These can be held for three main purposes:

- A working balance to help cushion the impact of uneven cash flows and avoid unnecessary temporary borrowing – this forms part of general reserves.
- A contingency to cushion the impact of unexpected events and emergencies – this also forms part of general reserves.
- A means of building up funds, often referred to as earmarked reserves, to meet known or predicted requirements; earmarked reserves are accounted for separately but remain legally part of the General Fund.

Officers ensure that the Authority has sufficient funds available to deal with planned activities which require reserve contributions, and also unanticipated events in the future.

The main use of reserves over the last few years has been capital expenditure, particularly the major development at Telford. When the Major Projects Reserve has been depleted, following completion of the scheme, the remaining resource reserve levels will be reviewed against the principles laid out in the Reserves Strategy to ensure that they remain adequate for the Authority's requirements.

The table below outlines the reserves held by the Authority and their estimated use over the next three years.

	01/04/24 £000	Spend £000	Income £000	31/03/25 £000	Spend £000	Income £000	31/03/26 £000	Spend £000	Income £000	31/03/27 £000
Capital Reserves:										
Major Projects	4,000	-4,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Resource Reserves:										
General	456	0	0	456	0	0	456	0	0	456
Extreme Incidents	219	0	0	219	0	0	219	0	0	219
Pensions and Other Staff Matters	678	0	0	678	0	0	678	0	0	678
Information and Communications Technology (ICT)	776	-250	0	526	-250	0	276	-250	0	26
Income Volatility	687	0	0	687	0	0	687	0	0	687
Service Transformation Programme Staff	974	-300	0	674	-300	0	374	-300	0	74
Service Delivery	10	-10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Building Maintenance	300	-50	0	250	-50	0	200	-50	0	150
Operational Equipment	274	-50	0	224	-50	0	174	-50	0	124
Training	127	-50	0	77	-50	0	27	-27	0	0
Total	8,501	-4,710	0	3,791	-700	0	3,091	-677	0	2,414

Once the capital reserves have been depleted following the completion of major projects, the Authority will hold reserves equal to 9.8% of its net revenue budget by 31 March 2026.

Efficiency Savings

Fire authorities were tasked by the Home Office to identify efficiencies which represented 2% of non pay budgets, across the spending review period.

The Fire Authority approved a strategic efficiency and productivity review as part of its Service Plan in 2022/23 and acknowledged that this area would form a part of all strategic reviews being undertaken. It was agreed that the review should be based around the requirements of the Service's Efficiency & Productivity Plan, submitted in March 2023.

Reviews took place in August and September 2023 and involved staff from several departments:

Area Command

Prevention and Protection

Workshops and Fleet

Equipment and Uniform

Facilities

Development

Operations and Training

HR, Corporate Services and EDI

ICT

The reviews identified a wide range of examples where efficiencies have been made. Some of these have produced cashable savings, detailed below, and others have freed officer time which can be utilised on other tasks within the Service.

The schedule at Appendix B shows the areas where efficiencies have been identified and work will now begin on realising cash or time savings for the Service.

Some of the areas listed may require investigation and implementation and this is dependent on the capacity within the Service. However, it is important to consider these as 'invest to save' pieces of work, to release ongoing benefit for the Service.

In addition to the efficiencies laid out within the plan, work carried out on on-call station costings has identified a number of reduction scenarios, pre-empting any necessary savings in the medium term. These scenarios will form part of the CRMP 2025-2029.

Cashable savings achieved over the spending review from 2022/23 and those that have been identified in 2024/25 are detailed in the table below.

Efficiency Savings	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000
Capital Financing			
Net borrowing costs	-200		-130
<p>22/23 - As part of its strategic planning, the Authority identified a £200,000 reduction in the financial year 2022/23. This was 2.7% of non pay budgets for that year and recognised that the Authority had reduced the borrowing requirement for its capital programme, including major developments at Telford training centre and fire station.</p> <p>24/25 - Further contributions of surplus and underspend into the Major Projects Reserve have resulted in a reduction in debt charges for the major refurbishment at Telford. This reflects a more efficient funding stream for the capital programme.</p>			
Supplies and Services			
Insurance premiums		-50	
ICT contracts		-111	
Laundry			-10
<p>23/24 - this year saw a reduction in non pay budgets of £161,000 (2.15%). A successful renegotiation on the Service's wide area network contract saw savings of £111,000, which was rediverted into further development of cyber security. A total of £50,000 was also saved on the Authority's suite of insurance premiums; this was because of a very favourable claims history over a number of years.</p> <p>24/25 – replacement of fire kit will reduce ongoing laundry costs, due to less frequent repairs, offsetting increases in cleaning costs as firefighter contamination risks are better understood and managed.</p>			

Transport Costs			
Mileage			-30
Vehicle servicing			-10
24/25 – the move to more meetings and conferences being held online has resulted in a reduction in mileage costs. Costs for vehicle servicing has also been reduced, due to aspects of appliance servicing frequencies being assessed and extended.			
Indirect Staff Costs			
Development			-30
24/25 – introduction of a virtual career path gateway for operational staff from firefighters up to area managers has created a more efficient promotion process. This has removed the requirement for external venues, actors, and assessors.			
Total Efficiency Savings	-200	-161	-210
Revenue Expenditure Budget	23,260	26,562	29,179
Non pay budget (£000)	4,451	6,892	9,146
Efficiency savings as a % of non-pay budget	4.49%	2.34%	2.30%
Cumulative efficiency savings			3.04%
Efficiency savings target	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%

In addition to the efficiencies detailed above, there are examples of efficient working being demonstrated across the Service.

Collaboration

Shared Premises

A county-wide agreement is in place with **West Mercia Police**, for shared use of all Service premises as drop in centres. Whilst there is limited use of police premises by fire staff, several fire stations are used by police colleagues.

Shropshire Council use Fire Headquarters as a secure, 24 hour occupied site to monitor its CCTV across the county.

West Midlands Search & Rescue and **Midland Cave Rescue** use Tweedale fire station as a base for their operations. A formal arrangement is being drafted which will see this accommodation being provided in a reciprocal agreement for support with rescue activities, which demonstrates operational benefits from being co located.

Agreements with other organisations

The Service is part of a consortium including **West Mercia Police**, which provides a framework for the purchase of operational response and light vehicles. This has streamlined the procurement process and ensured value for money. The Police also provide vehicle maintenance services for non operational light vehicles, removing the requirement for an additional mechanic.

Agreements are also in place with **West Mercia Police** for assistance with searching for missing persons, and gaining entry, to support **West Midlands Ambulance Service**.

Agreements are in place with **Shropshire Council** for the Treasurer, provision of treasury services and property maintenance.

Agreements are in place with **Telford & Wrekin Council** for provision of finance and human resources systems, procurement support, legal services, and the Monitoring Officer.

A Fire Alliance is in place with **Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority**, which enables the two services to collaborate in ways that create capacity and resilience for both. Joint specification and procurement were put in place for command support units and work is underway to identify further procurement opportunities in relation to specialist appliances such as aerial ladder platforms.

A major collaboration is in place with **Hereford & Worcester, Durham & Darlington and Cleveland Fire and Rescue Authorities**, for a replacement Command & Control

system. This collaboration ensures improved resilience, increased support with recommendations from the Grenfell Inquiry, and will maintain and improve cross service working arrangements.

The establishment of a joint secretariat within the **Local Resilience Forum** has removed the duplication of administration for all partners and ensures compliance with legislation, such as requirement placed upon the Authority through the Civil Contingencies Act.

Internal audit services are currently provided by **Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Services** and the Authority are about to begin talks with WIASS to become a partner.

Energy and fuels are provided through the **West Mercia Energy** consortium ensuring value for money and resilient bulk fuel supplies.

Asset Management and Use of Technology

A new workshops management system, **Chevin Fleetwave**, has replaced the existing vehicle management system. Vehicle defects are reported into Fire Control via a Sharepoint portal, and this is then updated in Chevin; this has introduced greater efficiencies into the reporting process. Access is being considered for Fire Control to input directly into Chevin, however the ability for mechanics to access and view data needs to be maintained.

A paper based process was in place prior to the introduction of Chevin, which was then manually transferred into the old system. Mechanics are now utilising tablets to enter data directly into the system, a more efficient and accurate procedure.

The IT Helpdesk, **Freshserve**, has been developed and is being introduced into other areas of the Service:

- Administration services are now requested via the system to the Service's Corporate Support department.
- Operation staff can request operational cover and support for exercises and training from Group Support Teams and Retained Support Officers.
- Defect reporting through the system has created efficiencies for Technical Services. A stock management system is also being developed to streamline the purchase, issue, disposal and recording of stock.

Resources Review

The Resources Review forms part of the Service's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) which will run from 2025 to 2029 and will confirm the most effective and efficient way of matching resources to risk. The review is currently underway and will feed directly into the CRMP on its completion.

The three main areas and the findings to date are detailed below.

Rescue Tender – a review has been carried out prior to the replacement of the Service's reserve rescue tender, based at Wellington. Recommendations following the review are that the regular appliance at Wellington should be enhanced with rescue capability upon its replacement, and that there is a refresh of some rescue equipment at the station. This will result in a saving in debt charges on £250k as no direct replacement of the reserve rescue tender is required.

Working at Height – data from incidents involving the Service's two existing aerial ladder platforms (ALP) has been analysed, to determine recommendations for the types of vehicles required at replacement, and their location. There is currently no evidence to suggest that 2 ALPs will be required; it is likely that one like for like replacement will be recommended, along with the enhancement of another vehicle within the operational fleet. This is likely to save debt charges on around £500k.

Water Availability – The Service's capital programme currently provides for the replacement of a prime mover, water carrier, and environmental and foam pods, totalling £700k. Three appliances strategically placed around the county now carry foam, therefore it has been established that there is no requirement for the foam pod, The environment unit can be a stand alone vehicle, likely to be a large van replaced at a later date. This results in a reduction in debt charges and a more effective and efficient operational fleet.

The Service currently has three pumping units, one of which is for national resilience. One of these units is due for renewal and initial analysis suggests that this can be replaced with a water carrier, likely to be around £150k less than the scheme approved for the pumping unit's replacement.

Procurement

The Service uses established framework agreements or contracts wherever possible and uses partners to support the procurement process. Recent activities include:

Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation (YPO), who provided specialist procurement support and managed the tender activity and contract award for:

- Firekit replacement
- Insurance
- Occupational Health

Consortium Procurement Construction (CPC), who enabled direct award of window replacement contracts across many locations, minimising the work necessary to manage an award process.

West Mercia Energy – Management of purchase of electricity, gas and bulk fuel, and provision of usage monitoring tools.

Fusion21 – Access to a contract for rating valuation appeals

Telford & Wrekin Council's Dynamic Purchasing System, which has been used for the contract structure of the refurbishment project at Telford fire station and training centre.

Frameworks at **Staffordshire County Council**, used for building works through Entrust, including tarmacking and reroofing at Tweedale fire station.

The **Crown Commercial Service** framework has been used for light vehicles (via **Police**) and for ICT purchases

A major procurement exercise is in place with **Hereford & Worcester, Durham & Darlington and Cleveland Fire and Rescue Authorities**, for a replacement Command & Control system. This collaboration ensures improved resilience, increased support with recommendations from the Grenfell Inquiry, and will maintain and improve cross service working arrangements.

Shift patterns

Wholetime Duty System - The Service has introduced a process of flexible shift exchanges as part of the wholetime shift system. This process affords flexibility within the staffing model whereby staff can self-roster with the aim of maintaining optimum crewing levels (effectively no surplus staff are being accommodated).

Other Efficiencies

Further areas where efficiencies are being implemented or explored include:

- Introduction of modern-gov to replace paper-based systems for members papers/meeting documentation.
- Introduction of IDVT – Identity Document Validation Technology to digitise right to work checks.
- Further digitisation of payroll claims to reduce manual processes and streamline systems.
- Continuation of joint working with Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service to rationalise numbers of vehicles required for resilience across the two authority areas.
- Fire survival guidance has moved from a paper based process to the Unblur system
- Operational risk guidance has been moved from a paper based process and is now electronic.
- The introduction of local agreements which spread annual leave across the year should lead to a reduction in overtime costs.

Productivity Improvements

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority is pursuing the national Spending Review target of improving the productivity of wholetime firefighters by 3% by 2024/25.

The completion of the Home Office's Firefighter Utilisation Surveys has enabled officers to establish **a baseline of 95,700 active hours**, upon which to measure 3% of productivity improvements (**2,871 active hours**) and has prompted action in several areas.

This analysis has highlighted the lack of **fire safety audits** carried out by wholetime staff. This is currently being addressed, by using Uplift grant to upskill wholetime firefighters to carry out simple audits.

Targets are set for station watches for number of **safe and well visits** carried out per month. It is estimated that an average of 50% of attempts to carry out a safe and well visit are unsuccessful, due to the lack of contact details provided with a referral. The use of the national on-line home fire safety check could improve the quality of information received and securing of contact details at this point would reduce unproductive hours (around 680 hours), increase successful visits, and improve outcomes for the Service.

The Service's senior management team are reviewing the policy around **unwanted fire signals**, particularly call challenging and when to attend. Where it has been established

that no risk is present, there may be no mobilisation. It is estimated that around 500 hours could be diverted to more productive activity through this policy change.

The Service operates a 10 hour day shift, and a review will take place of the activities carried out during this period. The move of **station routines, health & safety checks, monthly and quarterly testing, and fitness sessions** from the day to the night shift would increase hours available in the day for prevention and protection and training.

A review has taken place which has analysed the way in which **training** is delivered across all aspects of the Service. The number of courses being run in house has been reduced by maximising attendance, which has created savings in training costs and overtime. A flexible training programme has been introduced for on call training, which has reduced time away from primary employers and has resulted in fewer loss of earnings claims.

The review also looked at the delivery of training to wholetime staff and how this could be made more efficient. Firefighters required to attend a training course were taken off duty and the shift covered by overtime. This inflated costs and required firefighters to commit to training whilst off duty. A new training delivery model has been introduced which allows courses to be delivered whilst staff are on duty, minimising shift replacement costs and allowing firefighters to complete essential training in working hours.

New Technology

One of the main drivers of productivity improvements elsewhere is the development and introduction of new technology, to continue the Authority's transformation of functions, systems, procedures, and processes.

The Service has already identified several productivity improvements.

- **Staff** – Wholetime Duty System - The Service has introduced a process of flexible shift exchanges as part of the Wholetime shift system. This process affords flexibility within the staffing model whereby staff can self-roster with the aim of maintaining optimum crewing levels (effectively no surplus staff are being accommodated).
- **Technology** - digitisation and streamlining of financial processes has reduced manual processing for staff, creating more time for services that add value to customers. In addition, introduction of the Fire Service Rota system has created productivity improvements in availability and pay processing.
- **Performance** - development of performance dashboards has enabled intelligence led decision making for using assets in the most effective manner.
- **Recruitment** - an end to end process has replaced paper based processes.
- **Resources** - vehicle maintenance and checking standards have been reviewed and, after a period of sample testing, oil change frequencies have generally been

changed from annually to every 2 years, reducing cost, time taken and environmental impact.

- **Protection** – Uplift grant has been used to purchase Experian data which has provided more accurate understanding of high risk premises. Use of the data, which uses building types and activity to produce a combined risk score, has resulted in more targeted protection activity. This ensures that hours spent in this area are more productive and that outcomes are improved.

Summary

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority has a proven history of continuous improvement and sound strategic financial planning and the initiatives outlined above will go forward with this approach.

The Authority has surpassed the Home Office target of 2% efficiencies on the non pay budget across the spending review period. The Efficiencies Review undertaken in 2023 has demonstrated that officers across the Service are committed to working more efficiently and effectively, by identifying further savings to be diverted to priority areas within the Service.

Teams across the Service have been enthusiastic in demonstrating productivity improvements; it is essential that these improvements are measured, recorded and reported.

During 2024/25, work will continue on the measurement of productivity on wholetime stations. Changes to the way in which training courses are delivered, and analysis of the success of safe and well visits, will enable officers to identify savings and release more capacity for improving outcomes for the people of Shropshire.