

Productivity and Efficiency Plan

Report of the Treasurer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report presents the annual Fire and Rescue Authority's Productivity and Efficiency Plan.

2 Recommendation

The Fire Authority is asked to consider, and approve for publication, the 2025/06 - 2026/27 Productivity and Efficiency Plan

3 Background

The Fire and Rescue Authority are required to produce an annual Productivity and Efficiency Plan. The Productivity and Efficiency Plan provides the context for how Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service will continue to deliver value for money while maintaining an effective, resilient and locally responsive service.

With effect from 1 July 2025, Ministerial responsibility for Fire transferred from the Home Office to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG). The plan has been prepared in line with MHCLG guidance.

4 Context

Productivity and Efficiency Plans remain an essential mechanism for ensuring that Services are high-performing, financially transparent and accountable. They also enable a clear national picture of efficiency, productivity and innovation across England.

It also supports the national ambition, agreed through the Spending Review, for Fire and Rescue Services in England to secure 2% non-pay efficiencies and improve whole -time firefighter productivity by 3%.

Initial data analysis of firefighter workforce capacity and productivity is being reviewed to add greater insights as to how the Service can best provide effective prevention, protection and response activity. The combined use of wholetime and On Call is consistently monitored to ensure optimal cover is available.

Service Delivery teams are working with the Digital and Data team to improve accuracy and capture granular detail of workforce productivity using the Data Entry Conventions activity and category codes established to inform comparable data within Services across England.

Emerging opportunities for further capture and monitoring of efficiencies are being introduced to ensure the financial sustainability of the Service over the coming years to meet increased budget deficit challenges.

Service changes and achievements should be noted within the report, recognising the Service is continually evolving to enhance capability and strengthen future resilience.

5 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6 Legal Comment

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7 Communications

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

8 Equality Impact Assessment

There are no equality or diversity implications arising from this report. An Equality Impact Assessment is not, therefore, required.

9 Appendix

Productivity and Efficiency Plan 2025/26 - 2026/27.

10 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.



Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service
Productivity and Efficiency Plan
2025/2026 - 2026/27



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Context

This Productivity and Efficiency Plan provides the context for how Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service will continue to deliver value for money while maintaining an effective, resilient and locally responsive service.

With effect from 1 July 2025, Ministerial responsibility for Fire transferred from the Home Office to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG). This plan has been prepared in line with MHCLG guidance.

Productivity and Efficiency Plans remain an essential mechanism for ensuring that Services are high-performing, financially transparent and accountable. They also enable a clear national picture of efficiency, productivity and innovation across England.

It also supports the national ambition, agreed through the Spending Review, for Fire and Rescue Services in England to secure 2% non-pay efficiencies and improve whole-time firefighter productivity by 3%.

This document explains the financial position, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service approach to efficiency and productivity, and the key initiatives that will support sustainable improvement.

The plan focuses on what has been achieved in financial year 2025/26 and how planning will continue to maximise productivity and efficiency for the current financial year 2026/27 and beyond.



Revenue Budget

The Service's revenue budget is funded primarily through council tax precept and additionally through the local government financial settlement from central government and other grants. The budget figures for 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27 reflect the actual budgets approved by the Fire Authority.

The forecast budget projections for 2027/28 onwards have been used to create the Fire Authority's medium-term financial plan, informing the assessment of future affordability and sustainability over the planning period.

Details of the budget position are contained in the table below:

BUDGET (£000)					
Revenue Expenditure	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029
Direct Employee	21,979	24,127	24,462	25,113	25,785
Indirect Employee	437	521	517	517	517
Premises	1,240	1,317	1,663	1,663	1,663
Transport	693	760	746	745	745
Supplies and Services	3,206	3,342	3,572	3,727	3,881
Capital Financing	1,538	1,880	1,634	2,130	2,617
Other	382	509	157	466	681
Total	29,475	31,438	32,437	33,429	34,527
Income	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029
Actual / Forecast Received from Precept	- 20,170	- 21,779	- 22,741	- 23,977	- 25,366
Local Government Finance Settlement	- 9,008	- 8,304	- 8,341	- 8,097	- 7,806
Other Grants	- 49	- 1,107	- 1,107	- 1,107	- 1,107
Income Raised Locally	- 248	- 248	- 248	- 248	- 248
Total	- 29,475	- 31,438	- 32,437	- 33,429	- 34,527

Council tax precept income funds 70% of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service activity in 2026/27. Based on current planning assumptions, this is forecast to increase to 73% by 2028/29 as a result of the Fair Funding Review and the associated reduction in local government finance settlement funding over the Spending Review 2025 period.



A commitment to review the central government Fire funding formula has been made in line with the next Spending Review. Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service have representation engaged in the government review to ensure that the factors which influence the funding formula allocation supports a fair and equitable distribution of resources.

In preparing the forecast budgets, the Fire Authority has assumed that council tax precept income will increase by the maximum amount currently permitted, which is £4.99 for a Band D property. This assumption is important in maintaining financial resilience, but it also highlights the extent to which future funding plans remain dependent on locally raised income.

In contrast, reductions in the local government finance settlement over the Spending Review period will increase pressure on the revenue budget, particularly in 2027/28 and 2028/29, creating a deficit in the affordability of the budget.

It is evident that the future funding position presents a more challenging financial outlook and underlines the need for continued cashable efficiency measures, careful financial management and forward planning to ensure that service delivery remains sustainable.



Budget Reserves

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

When reviewing medium-term financial plans and preparing annual budgets, Services should consider the establishment and maintenance of reserves.

Reserves can be made for three main purposes:

- A working balance to help manage the impact of uneven cash flows and avoid unnecessary temporary borrowing, this forms part of general reserves.
- A contingency to manage 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 Fire Authority has sufficient funds available to deal with planned activities which require reserve contributions and unforeseen future risks.

Reserve levels are reviewed against the principles laid out in the Reserves Strategy to ensure that they remain adequate for the Fire Authority's requirements.

Details of the reserves position is contained within the table below:

RESERVES (£000)					
	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029
General Reserves	577	577	577	577	577
Earmarked Revenue Reserves of which MRP reserve					
Earmarked Capital Reserves	4,890	4,395	2,198	1,080	-
Other Reserves of which revenue	5,299	5,179	4,500	4,000	3,500
of which capital	210	210	105	-	
Total	10,976	10,361	7,380	5,657	4,077



Efficiency

Efficiency refers to reducing inputs to deliver the same or better outputs, essentially doing the same with less. Efficiencies may be cashable, leading to a direct reduction in spending so that budgets can be reprioritised elsewhere. Cashable efficiencies may generate a recurring saving, enabling a reduction in budgets over multiple years. Cashable efficiencies may also generate a non-recurring saving, where a one-off or temporary reduction in expenditure has been realised. Efficiencies may also be non-cashable, meaning there is no direct spending reduction, but higher quality outputs are achieved.

Direct Employees

Recurrent efficiencies have been generated through reduced wholetime overtime.

A value for money exercise for operational Fixed Term Contracts (FTCs) is to be undertaken. Over recent years, the Service has consistently employed up to nine additional Firefighters on FTCs to cover long-term sickness, secondments (internal and external), and inefficient workforce planning. Increasing the firefighter establishment may provide greater flexibility to manage these staffing variances.

A review of staff support during absence is also required due to direct staff costs being incurred when staff are absent, as well as additional costs being incurred to provide temporary cover for posts.

Workforce planning tools are being introduced in 2026/27 to enable greater ability to align resources to the highest risk areas and ensure staff are equipped with the right skills in the right place. This will enable a greater ability to understand the current workforce capabilities, critical roles, develop talent and inform effective succession planning.

Indirect Employees

The Service is trialling an in-house Career Progression Gateway (CPG) for 2026, called Readiness for Promotion. This will utilise the existing Individual Performance Development Report process to identify individuals who are ready for promotion, rather than using an external provider to run CPG assessments. Success of this trial will result in recurring cashable efficiencies.



Premises

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

Agreements are in place with Shropshire Council for property maintenance.

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.

Transport

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.

Supplies and Services

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

Internal audit services are currently provided by Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Services.



Capital Financing

A budget planning session was held in March 2026 which included a review of the capital programme. This assessed the requirement of budgets approved in previous financial years which had not yet been delivered, the 2026/27 in-year capital programme and capital items in the medium-term financial plan. This exercise resulted in a number of items being able to be removed from the capital programme which in turn has reduced the level of capital debt required and delivered recurrent net borrowing cost efficiencies.

Treasury support services are provided through Shropshire Council to continue to support investment which is the primary source of income.

Details are provided in the efficiency and income tables.

Future Efficiencies

Face Masks – The Service has historically relied on disposable face masks for specific operational activities where the use of Breathing Apparatus is not required or practicable. These masks form part of the Service’s Respiratory Protective Equipment provision for lower-risk incidents. The Service has conducted a trial to move towards reusable Half Face Respirators which is consistent with a growing national evidence base highlighting the significant health risks associated with fire contaminants. In addition to improved health and safety benefits this will also generate cashable efficiencies.

Working at Height – Data from incidents involving the Service’s two existing aerial ladder platforms (ALP) appliances has been analysed, to determine recommendations for the types of vehicles required at replacement and their location. A decision has been made to reduce the requirement from 2 ALPs to 1 which will reduce the capital replacement cost and associated debt charges.

Water Availability – The Service’s capital programme provided for the replacement of a prime mover, water carrier, and environmental and foam pods. 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. This results in a reduction in debt charges and a more effective and efficient operational fleet.



Collaboration

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 the ALP.

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.

Assessment of Efficiencies

Aligning activity to Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's Community Risk Management Plan which covers 2025 to 2029, determines the most effective and efficient way of allocating budgets and resources to risk.

Overall, the Service's approach to efficiency reflects a combination of cashable savings, improved use of resources and collaborative working arrangements. Efficiencies have been achieved through changes to workforce deployment, reductions in overtime, shared procurement and support arrangements, and reviews of capital and operational requirements. In addition, current trials and planned service changes are expected to generate further efficiencies in future years while supporting the delivery of a resilient, risk-based service.

EFFICIENCY DATA (£000)

Shropshire and Wrekin	Actual 2024-25		Actual 2025-26		Forecast 2026-27		Forecast 2027-28		Forecast 2028-29	
Opening Revenue Expenditure Budget (Net)	29,228		30,084		31,083		32,073		33,172	
Less Total Direct Employee Costs	22,176		23,776		24,344		24,996		25,667	
Non Pay Budget	7,052		6,308		6,739		7,077		7,505	
Efficiency Savings	Recurrent	Non-recurrent	Recurrent	Non-recurrent	Recurrent	Non-recurrent	Recurrent	Non-recurrent	Recurrent	Non-recurrent
<u>Direct Employee</u>										
Reduction in Prevention/Protection/Response Staff	-	-	94							
Reduction in Support Staff	-	-								
<u>Indirect Employee (e.g. training, travel etc.)</u>										
All Indirect Employee Costs	30									
<u>Premises</u>										
Utilities										
Rent/Rates				100	100					
Other Premises Costs										
Shared Premises										
<u>Transport</u>										
Fleet										
Fuel										
Other Transport Costs										
<u>Supplies and Services</u>										
National Procurement Savings										
Local Procurement Savings			13							
Other Technology Improvements										
Decreased Usage	50									
<u>Capital Financing</u>										
Revenue Expenditure Charged to Capital										
Net Borrowing Costs	130		100		246					
<u>Other</u>										
Other Savings										
Total Efficiency Savings (excluding direct employee savings)	210		213		346		0		0	
Efficiency Savings as a Percentage of Non-Payroll Budgets	2.98%		3.38%		5.13%		0.00%		0.00%	

INCOME

£000

	Actual 2024-25		Actual 2025-26		Forecast 2026-27		Forecast 2027-28		Forecast 2028-29	
	Recurrent	Non-recurrent	Recurrent	Non-recurrent	Recurrent	Non-recurrent	Recurrent	Non-recurrent	Recurrent	Non-recurrent
Income generated from charging policies										
Income generated from trading operations										
Income generated from shared premises										
Income generated from interest on investments	220		220		220		220		220	
Income generated from other sources	28		28		28		28		28	
Total	248	-	248	-	248	-	248	-	248	-



Productivity

A Service is more productive when it increases outputs or improves outcomes whilst using the same level of inputs for an activity.

Collaboration

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

A new procurement agreement has been established with **West Mercia Police** during 2025/26, along with the appointment of a procurement officer within Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service to maximise the use of established framework agreements and contracts. In addition to ensuring compliance with revised Procurement Law, this will drive increased value for money and is anticipated to create future financial efficiencies.

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

Asset Management and IT Investment

Premises - Asset surveys are being conducted in 2026/27 to inform the condition of the estate. Some sites have had refurbishment in 2025/26 and are being equipped with fitness hubs, although many remain aged and underinvested. Data analysis has been conducted to breakdown the operating costs associated with each site. Continued monitoring of costs is being introduced with consideration of trend insights, possible opportunities, as well as undertaking comparators of benchmarking data.

IT Mobile Data Terminals – Improved devices have been installed on fire appliances to provide crews with incident details and mobilising information, risk, mapping and navigation and communication with fire control.

Digital and video technology - Office based digital and video technology upgrades are required to be undertaken during 2026/27 to enable remote meetings to become more stable and effective.



Systems – A new project management system has been developed in 2025/26 to be implemented in 2026/27. Other system upgrades to be undertaken in 2026/27 to enable more productive ways of working also include the stock management system to streamline the purchase, issue, disposal and recording of stock, as well as a committee management system to enable effective management of the governance of the Fire Authority.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) - The use of AI is being exploited where possible to improve productivity. A cohort of 9 individuals are undertaking a 12-month apprenticeship with Multiverse to build structured data and AI capability across the Service tied to measurable operational outcomes, and to move from reactive, manual processes to enable proactive and informed decision-making. Following positive feedback, a second cohort is being explored. In addition, 30 co-pilot licenses were trialled in 2025/26 with positive feedback informing an additional 30 licences being issued in 2026/27.

Resourcing:

Wholetime Duty System Shift Patterns - 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).

Protection - The 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.

Income Generation

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service does not generate Service income from charging policies, trading operations or shared premises.

Incidents requiring cross boundary attendance is activated by fire control where this provides the optimal operational response. This may result in Shropshire Fire and rescue Service attending emergencies outside of the county, which is reciprocated where necessary from bordering Services.



Outcome Based Activities

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service are generating data insights into whole time and on-call activities to inform operational excellence and efficiency.

Area Command have assessed where value can be added back into the wider Service through support to other departments either utilising additional capacity, modified duties or on duty crews. Area Command have made a start with activity recording through a daily return based on Call Sign, this is currently done through a Microsoft Form. The data collected through this form is a challenge to administer and does not offer information to the necessary managers. Improved reporting capability is required to inform accurate recording methodology to enable productivity to be measured more reliably.

Workforce Capacity

Initial data analysis of firefighter workforce capacity and productivity is being reviewed to add greater insights as to how the Service can best provide effective prevention, protection and response activity. The combined use of wholetime and on-call is consistently monitored to ensure optimal cover is available.

Service delivery teams are working with the digital and data team to improve accuracy and capture granular detail using the Data Entry Conventions activity and category codes. Future applications to coordinate this data is being developed to provide comparable data within Services across England.

Increasing Productivity

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is exploring opportunities to create greater productivity across the whole of Area Command prevention, protection and response activity.

Business Fire Safety - Area Command has identified capacity to support the Business Fire Safety team through its L3 trained staff. This could be done through utilisation of additional crewing or for a prolonged period by utilising fixed term contracts to backfill where required.



Community Fire Safety – There are opportunities to improve the way Community Fire Safety is delivered. Home fire safety visits are pre-set by the Community Fire Safety team with directions to carry out up to 3 visits to attempt to make contact. These visits do not always enable crews to make effective contact with the public. Attempts to gather more comprehensive information would enable crews to make contact in advance. Activity is to be considered holistically, possibly removing targets for visits and identifying where crews add most value to the community such as community engagement activity, schools' visits, road and water campaigns.

Training – To deliver 3 specialist stations across the Service and meet national guidance standard there will be a requirement to increase the proportion of time spent training, this can be supported by encouraging station-based instructors across all disciplines. Crews have recognised the need for additional specialist training, along with policy and equipment. These instructors could then be utilised to cover shortfalls within the training department when wholetime crews are unable to facilitate additional training above those scheduled by the training department.



Service changes and achievements

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service are embarking on some key changes as to how the Service will operate. Significant efforts have been undertaken during 2025/26 to enable changes to be implemented and embedded in 2026/27.

Fire Command and Control project:

The Fire Control project is a collaborative initiative and integrated project approach across four Fire and Rescue Services (Hereford & Worcester, Shropshire, Cleveland, and Durham & Darlington) to deliver a shared fire control solution. This represents a significant change from separate local arrangements, with procurement, legal, project management and technical work being undertaken collectively on behalf of all partners. This approach is proven to be considerably more cost effective. These changes are being made to improve resilience, reduce duplication, secure better value for money and give the Service access to specialist expertise and shared capability that would be more difficult and costly to deliver independently. The project delivers a high-value, shared control capability, combining cost efficiency, pooled expertise, and strengthened inter-service collaboration, with a sustainable financial model for delivery and operation.

Training Facilities:

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is progressing the development of new fire training facilities to strengthen its long-term training capacity and support the delivery of specialist operational competence across the organisation. While these facilities are being developed and existing provision is unavailable, the Service is working collaboratively with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service to deliver refresher training and with the Fire Service College to support the training of new recruits. This approach helps to maintain training continuity, ensures staff competence is sustained, and provides a practical interim solution while enhanced longer-term training arrangements are put in place.



Portfolio Management Office:

A Portfolio Management Office was introduced during 2025/26 to strengthen the governance and oversight of service change activity. A system has been developed to provide a more structured approach to managing programmes and projects, enabling clearer prioritisation, improved monitoring and stronger control over delivery. This change is intended to ensure that projects are aligned to organisational priorities, that benefits are identified and realised, and that change is implemented in a more consistent and effective way within the Service.

Fire Authority Governance:

During 2025/26, the Fire Authority reviewed its governance arrangements following the need to strengthen oversight of the Service. In response, a new Performance and Scrutiny Committee was established, which is also attended by three independent members to provide greater challenge, transparency and assurance. This change is intended to improve overall governance, support more effective decision-making and ensure strategic outcomes are achieved.



Summary

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority is committed to continuous operational improvement, forward planning and prudent financial management. This Productivity and Efficiency Plan demonstrates how the Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is responding to a more challenging funding environment while continuing to protect frontline service delivery, maintain resilience and deliver value for money for local communities.

The plan sets out the approach to securing efficiencies through workforce planning, collaboration, procurement, revised capital investment and service review. It also shows that efficiency is being considered alongside productivity, with increasing emphasis on better use of data, improved recording of activity and more effective deployment of resources to support prevention, protection and response outcomes.

While future financial pressures remain, particularly in relation to funding reform and the growing reliance on council tax precept, the Authority is ensuring that practical measures to improve affordability and sustainability over the medium term are adopted. Continued focus on measurable efficiency and productivity improvements will be essential to ensuring that resources remain aligned to risk and that the Service continues to meet its statutory responsibilities effectively.

Taken together, the initiatives described in this plan provide the basis for continued improvement and support the Fire Authority's responsibility to maintaining an efficient, productive and locally responsive Fire and Rescue Service committed to making Shropshire safer.