

Interim Training Facilities Requirements

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Executive Summary

The Authority is investing in a phased improvement of operational training facilities at the Telford Training Centre. This programme replaces the existing breathing apparatus (BA) hot training facility, known as the fire house, with facilities that are designed to meet future operational, wellbeing and contaminant control standards, rather than simply reinstating what was there before. Interim containerised compartment fire behaviour training (CFBT) capability is being procured, with the permanent solution scheduled for early 2027.

While that programme is delivered, the Service has put arrangements in place to protect operational competence. A reciprocal memorandum of understanding has been agreed with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service providing access to their facilities at no cost, and residential courses at the Fire Service College are being used to deliver BA initial training to new recruits. The first of these courses was delivered successfully in August 2026 for ten recruits, using Shropshire instructors.

This report is presented to the Strategy & Resources Committee for consideration and comment. The Committee is asked to recommend that the Fire Authority approves a budget of £200,000, excluding VAT, to commission two further courses at the Fire Service College.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to:

- a) Note the progress being made through the operational training facilities improvement programme, and the interim arrangements secured with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service at nil cost;
- b) Approve a budget of £200,000 for the delivery of two further BA initial courses at the Fire Service College during 2026/27; and.
- c) Receive a further update on the restoration of in Service BA training capability through routine reporting on the training facilities improvement programme.

3 Background

Operational training facilities at the Telford Training Centre have reached the end of their design life. Rather than continue a cycle of reactive repair, the Service Management Team agreed in September 2025 to pursue a two-stage improvement approach: immediate procurement and deployment of containerised CFBT capability to maintain BA initial and refresher delivery, and a phased redevelopment of the wider training estate. That decision has been reaffirmed since, and the existing fire house will be replaced rather than repaired.

This is a deliberate investment decision. The replacement facilities are being specified to support current national operational learning, including the findings of the South Wales report, and to design out avoidable contaminant exposure for both instructors and students. The predicted timeline for the permanent solution is 2027, with interim containerised capability forming part of the Service business continuity arrangements once the permanent facilities are in place.

Delivering that improvement means a period during which real fire and compartment firefighting training cannot be delivered on Service premises. The Service retains the capability to deliver cold training using cosmetic smoke, but this does not meet the requirements of the Breathing Apparatus National Operational Guidance (NOG) for the certification of new BA wearers. Interim external provision is therefore required to certify newly recruited firefighters.

4 Interim Training Arrangements Already in Place

The Service has taken a structured approach to maintaining competence during the transition:

- A reciprocal memorandum of understanding has been agreed with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, providing access to their facilities at no cost for the delivery of refresher training to crews who are already BA trained. This also establishes reciprocal business continuity cover for both Services and creates an ongoing opportunity to share practice.
- All elements of initial firefighter training other than BA and hazardous materials continue to be delivered in Service without interruption.
- BA initial training has been delivered residually at the Fire Service College. A course for ten recruits was delivered in August 2026 using Shropshire instructors, which maintained our own instructional standards and assessment ownership, and avoided any requirement for conversion training on return.

The August 2026 course demonstrated that this model works. It is the delivery route on which this budget request is based.

5 Interim Training Arrangements Already in Place

Assuming all nine recruits on Course 03/26 progress to the BA stage, sixteen trainee firefighters will require BA initial training by December 2026. The requirement by station is:

Station	Trainee firefighters requiring BA initial
Shrewsbury	5
Prees	2
Wem	2
Oswestry	1
Church Stretton	1
Much Wenlock	1
Albrighton	1
Bridgnorth	1
Ellesmere	1
Total	16

Eight of the sixteen are based at the three highest priority stations on the Service availability model, measured by hours of appliance availability against establishment. Shrewsbury, Prees and Oswestry are the three stations where additional BA qualified personnel will have the most immediate effect on appliance availability, which strengthens the case for commissioning further course capacity rather than deferring it.

Two courses of ten provide twenty places. This covers the sixteen confirmed trainees and gives headroom for the remaining recruit intake scheduled for 2026, avoiding the need to return to the Authority for a further decision within the same financial year.

6 Options Considered

OPTION 1: Defer BA initial courses until interim facilities are operational

Under this option the sixteen trainee firefighters would continue to ride as non-BA until in Service capability is restored.

Advantages:

- Lowest short-term cost.
- All other elements of initial firefighter training continue unaffected.
- Provides training team capacity to standardise delivery and develop future courses.

Disadvantages:

- Reduced appliance capability where crews carry fewer BA qualified personnel, concentrated at the stations where availability is already tightest.
- Delays progression of on call firefighters to competent firefighter status, with associated pay and retention consequences.
- Creates a training backlog that must be cleared in 2027 alongside a full refresher recovery programme and would in practice require recruitment to be paused.
- Adverse effect on station morale and on confidence in the improvement programme.

OPTION 2: Commission two further Fire Service College courses (preferred)

This is the model already proven in August 2026. The Fire Service College provides the real fire environment, accommodation and catering. Shropshire instructors deliver and assess the course, in line with our own training model and Safe Working Document 1-3-9 supervision ratios.

Advantages:

- Recruitment and firefighter development timelines are maintained, with no backlog carried into 2027.
- Appliance availability is protected across the Service, particularly in the on call duty system.
- Assessment and instructional standards remain under Shropshire control, so no conversion training is required on return.
- Courses align with the existing training calendar.

Considerations to be managed:

- Residential attendance is required from Sunday to Friday because of travel distance, which needs careful management for on call staff and those with caring responsibilities.
- Transport for students and operational equipment must be arranged, and compressor compatibility for Interspiro cylinders confirmed with the College in advance.

OPTIONS DISCOUNTED

- Mutual aid from Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service for initial course delivery. Staffordshire are supporting refresher training under the memorandum of understanding but do not have the capacity to host initial courses.
- Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, and Ministry of Defence sites. These facilities are gas powered, which does not align with the Shropshire training model.
- Splitting courses to reduce cost. This would require additional instructors to maintain health and safety supervision ratios, together with significant additional logistical support, and would not deliver a net saving.

- Repair of the existing facility. This was rejected by the Service Management Team as it would commit significant expenditure to a structure that is being replaced.

7 Preferred Option and Financial Requirement

Area Command and Training and Development are agreed that Option 2 is the preferred route, and Training and Development have confirmed they are able to support delivery.

Item	Cost (excluding VAT)
Fire Service College BA initial course 10 students, Shropshire instructors, inclusive of accommodation and catering (per course)	£100,000
Two courses (20 places)	£200,000
Total budget requested	£200,000

8 Conclusions

The Service is delivering a planned improvement to its operational training facilities that will provide a modern, sustainable and contaminant aware training environment for the next generation of Shropshire firefighters. Interim arrangements have been secured at nil cost with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service for refresher training, and a proven residential model is in place for initial training.

Approval of £200,000 (excluding VAT) for two further Fire Service College courses will certify twenty firefighters as BA wearers before the end of 2026, maintain appliance availability at the stations where it matters most, and ensure no training backlog is carried into the period when the new facilities come online. It is the option that best protects a safe and effective response to the communities of Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin during the transition.

9 Capacity

Approval of the recommended option maintains the planned throughput of the training calendar and avoids a backlog of BA initial and conversion training in 2027, at the point when the training team will also be commissioning and bedding in new facilities.

Deferring delivery would create capacity pressure in three places: Area Command, through reduced numbers of BA qualified personnel; Training and Development, through a compressed recovery programme; and training coordination, through the rescheduling of courses and reassessments.

10 Fire Alliance / Collaboration / Partnership Working

Collaboration has been actively pursued and has delivered a tangible result. The reciprocal memorandum of understanding with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service provides refresher training capability at no cost and establishes mutual business continuity cover. Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service were approached through the strategic alliance and offered support, but their facilities are gas powered and do not align with the Shropshire training model. Ministry of Defence sites present the same constraint.

Further senior level engagement with regional partners will continue, with the aim of broadening reciprocal training access as part of the longer-term facilities strategy.

11 Financial Implications

The financial implications are set out at section 7. Approval is sought for £200,000 (excluding VAT) in 2026/27. This is a one-off interim revenue cost associated with the transition to the new training facilities and is not expected to recur once in Service capability is restored.

12 Legal Comment

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service has a duty under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to ensure that firefighters are appropriately trained, equipped and competent to carry out their operational duties safely.

Breathing apparatus training is a critical component of firefighter safety, and delivery must align with the relevant National Operational Guidance and internal safe systems of work. The recommended option delivers certification through an accredited national provider using Shropshire instructors and maintains full compliance with those requirements.

Interim arrangements will continue to be supported by suitable risk assessment and training quality assurance processes, with any residual deviation from the standard training cycle recorded and managed through the corporate risk process.

Under the Fire Authority's current Delegations, decisions relating to the level of expenditure referred to in this report, rest with Fire Authority for consideration

13 HMICFRS Areas For Improvement, Cause of Concern, External Audit Recommendations

This report relates directly to the following inspection findings:

- Area for Improvement 23, which records that staff raised concerns about the condition of operational training facilities and the potential future impact on maintaining core competencies.
- The area for improvement relating to business continuity arrangements, which requires the Service to have appropriate arrangements in place, reviewed and tested against foreseeable threats and risks.

The facilities improvement programme, the reciprocal arrangement with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, and the interim delivery model set out in this report together form the Service response to those findings and will be presented as evidence at the next inspection.

14 Communications

The decision of the Authority will be communicated to all operational staff, with a specific briefing for on call stations and for the trainee firefighters affected. Communications will set out the course schedule, the support available for residential attendance, and the timeline for restoration of in Service capability, so that staff can see the interim arrangements in the context of the wider improvement programme.

15 Community Safety

Breathing apparatus capability is central to the ability of the Service to respond safely to incidents involving fire, smoke and hazardous atmospheres. Certifying twenty firefighters as BA wearers before the end of 2026 directly supports the protection of life, property and the environment across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.

16 Equality Impact Assessment

An e-EQIA has been completed. Residential attendance may not be equally accessible to all staff, particularly on call personnel and those with caring responsibilities.

17 Health and Safety

The recommended option supports the safe delivery of BA training and does not introduce any additional unmanaged health and safety risks.

18 Fire Standard Core Code of Ethics and Human Rights (including Data Protection)

There are no adverse impacts on compliance with the Fire Standards, Core Code of Ethics or human rights arising from this report. The recommendation supports the Fire Standard for Operational Competence by maintaining the pathway to competence for newly recruited firefighters.

19 The On Call Service

The On Call Service is the primary beneficiary of this recommendation. The majority of the trainee firefighters awaiting BA initial training are based at On Call stations, including several of those with the tightest appliance availability.

Approval enables their progression to competent firefighter status on the expected timeline and protects appliance availability.

Residential attendance places a demand on On-call staff and their primary employers. This will be managed through early notification of course dates, support for employer liaison, and the equality impact assessment referred to at section 16.

20 Public Value / Service Delivery

The recommended option delivers the required capability at approximately £75,000 less than the fully outsourced alternative and avoids the additional cost of conversion training. It protects appliance availability and prevents a training backlog that would carry a higher recovery cost in 2027. This represents good value for money for an interim arrangement of limited duration.

21 Reputation

Approval demonstrates that the Authority is investing to maintain firefighter competence and operational capability throughout the improvement of its training facilities, rather than allowing capability to drift during the transition. This supports the reputation of the Service as a professional, safe and operationally capable organisation with both staff and the public.

22 Training

The recommendation maintains the delivery of initial firefighter training to national standards throughout the transition period. It requires the abstraction of the instructor team for two residential periods, which will be planned into the training calendar. Restoration of in Service BA initial and refresher capability remains the objective of the wider facilities improvement programme, with interim containerised capability followed by permanent facilities in 2027.

23 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

24 Background Papers

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service, Training Facilities Review, 20 August 2025.

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service, Service Management Team paper, September 2025.

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service, BA Hot Training Facility, Service Management Team, January 2026.

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service, BA Initial Recruit Training Request, Service Delivery Meeting, 2026.

National Fire Chiefs Council, National Operational Guidance: Breathing Apparatus.