



Strategic Workforce Plan

2023-2025



HEREFORD & WORCESTER
HWFR
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

1. Introduction

The strategic workforce plan is intended to support the delivery of our Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), core organisational strategies and People Strategy, to ensure we have the right people with the right skills in place to deliver the best possible service to our communities. The Workforce Plan is in alignment with National Operational Guidance which states that 'Workforce planning is the process of balancing your workforce resource against your workforce needs so that you have enough skilled employees to meet demand. It includes analysing your current workforce, deciding on your workforce needs for the future, identifying any gaps between now and the future, and then deciding how you are going to approach this gap'.

The plan sets out the needs of the Service in relation to its predicted people and skills requirements for the next two years. It outlines our current workforce position, recognising challenges and opportunities, and enables us to identify and deploy the necessary interventions to assist and support planning, reflecting the principles of the Service's Workforce Planning policy.

The action plan in Appendix A is a starting point in ensuring we have the required workforce to achieve our strategic priorities. The plan will be refreshed on an annual basis as actions are fulfilled and new actions developed. Delivery of the actions contained within will be overseen by the Strategic Workforce Planning Group (SWPG) which meets on a quarterly basis.

The intention is to provide clear workforce planning information for the SWPG so key workforce related decisions can be made relating to promotion boards, recruitment processes, targeted positive action and workforce development. It must also take information and guidance for those decisions from the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

By anticipating the needs of the Service through the business planning process, the Service can ensure the foundations are in place to deliver Service objectives and can be factored into the budget planning process.

2. Aims

The workforce plan aims to:

- Maintain required establishment levels in our operational workforce;
- Consider the potential cost and any capacity impacts via effective and efficient workforce and vacancy management;
- Mitigate risks posed by single points of knowledge, particularly in specialist roles and succession plan effectively;
- Consider the level of skills and qualifications needed to meet legislative requirements in areas such as Protection;
- Consider the actions required to address under-representation within our workforce both at attraction and succession;
- Create better ability to respond to changing sector contexts;
- Plan for workforce development with organisational design and development;
- Reduce inefficiency with better teams and job design;
- Improve productivity and quality of service;
- Create effective talent management plans.

3. Methodology

Through the development of this plan the following approach has been adopted, as outlined in the Service’s Workforce Planning policy:

- Assess the current workforce
- Assess future workforce requirements
- Develop an action plan to fill the gaps between present and future

The development of this workforce plan has been based around engagement with strategic leaders and the HR team to identify the strategic drivers for change, challenges and risks to stabilising and retaining the existing workforce, as well as any workforce changes expected in the future and actions required.

4. Workforce drivers

Common workforce drivers for the Service have been themed below:

Drivers	Challenges/Risks
Embedding the workforce planning cycle into business planning	Attraction and Recruitment
Defining key data metrics and associated outcomes	Retention –turnover / staff progressing in career
Embracing changes in technology and communications	Local succession planning and workforce planning
Changing demographics, both workforce and local population	Age profile of workforce
Increasing the future workforce pipeline/grow our own	Work/life balance
Alternative roles in areas experiencing long term vacancies	Career entry pathways / apprenticeships
	Understanding of career pathways and tools to support learning and development, and transition between roles
	Financially constrained environment / management of fixed term posts
	Some reliance on agency workers
	Impacts of pension scheme changes to retirement decisions

The strategic context in which this workforce plan is set considers the following external and internal factors:

External

- National Firefighter Pension changes and remedies
- Role of PCCs and Governance models
- National Fire Chiefs Councils’ position statements and good practice
- Protection capability
- Emergency Response Driving (legislative requirements)

- National culture reform programme/s

Internal

- Attrition levels causing loss of critical skills and knowledge

- Planning and responding to uncertain financial challenges
- Attracting specialist skills and representation in all roles
- Investment in developing and upskilling our workforce
- Succession planning for operational and corporate roles

5. Labour market summary

The UK continues to struggle with labour shortages despite the estimated number of vacancies falling. A labour market overview from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) reveals between January and March 2023, the estimated number of vacancies fell for the ninth consecutive period – by 47,000 on the quarter to 1,105,000. ONS figures reflect the continued uncertainty across industries as survey respondents continue to cite economic pressures as a factor in holding back on recruitment. Overall, UK economic growth has been flat since spring last year, with the effects of high energy prices and rising interest rates taking their toll, along with industrial action in several sectors.

In terms of the local data in Herefordshire and Worcestershire, more than one in five adults in the West Midlands are out of the workplace, with ‘economic inactivity’ significantly increasing in the region. Latest regional labour market statistics show the West Midlands saw the largest increase in the economic inactivity rate compared with the same period last year, up by 2.2% to 22.7%.

Meanwhile the unemployment rate for the quarter from December 2022 to February 2023 compared to the previous three months rose to 4.6% while the employment rate across the region fell by 0.8% to 73.7%.

The significant proportion of West Midlands residents leaving the workforce over the past year places further pressure on a tight labour market. In an economic survey conducted by Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce (2023), 52% of businesses attempted to recruit staff over the last quarter and 69% of businesses had experienced recruitment difficulties. There were also a number of comments from businesses expressing their concern in finding suitable staff for their vacancies.

6. Financial context

The Service is required to operate within the resources it has available to it and on a financially sustainable basis. The Service has set a balanced budget for financial year 2023/24 and is currently developing longer term finance planning. It is important that the strategic priorities and objectives of the Service align with its budget.

7. Approved budget

The approved budget for 2023/24 is £39,971,800 for the year. There will be short term budget gaps which can be met from the Budget Reduction Reserve. Based upon expected use in 2022/23 the reserve could meet all of the gap to 2025/26 and about half of the 2026/27 gap. However, by 2026/27 the Authority will need to have identified on-going savings of around £750,000. The Service will seek to ensure that cost savings plans improve

efficiency and reduce costs in ways which minimise any impact on service users and the wider community such as monitoring growth in workforce numbers and reducing reliance on agency staff to implement more cost effective, stable and sustainable staffing models

8. Workforce at a glance

Key themes arising from our workforce profile:

- 9% of operational staff are women; compared to 10% nationally.
- 6% of operational staff are from an ethnic minority; compared to 4% nationally.
- 39% of women are in a managerial role.

A supply and demand analysis is undertaken prior to each quarterly Workforce Planning meeting to consider up to date data and intel.

9. Strategic workforce risks

The strategic workforce risks impacting on our current and future workforce are as follows:

Risks	
Operational establishment and skills	<p>The Service's establishment is likely to become much more volatile for at least the next four years as changes to the national Firefighter Pensions Scheme (FPS) are likely to result in unpredictable levels of attrition from the operational response workforce group. This may bring a loss of operational knowledge and experience and will continue to be a challenge for the Service. It is predicted a number (between 3 – 5%) of our experienced operational commanders may leave the Service through retirements over the two years, with 4 known leavers between now and the end of March 2025.</p> <p>The Service has committed to maintain its operational establishment of 96 Wholtime Firefighters to ensure operational resilience and this has required a further recruitment campaign in early 2023. On-Call recruitment is currently undertaken on an ongoing basis due to challenges in attraction and retention. Additionally, there are pressures which are as a result of career progression through the Service as we seek to promote behind our Senior and Middle Manager vacancies.</p> <p>Furthermore, depending on the direction of the remedy, some Officers may leave before our modelling assumes. Moving forward, our ability to predict operational retirements significantly reduces. In addition, with societal changes in employment behaviour, like other sectors, we are likely to have a more transient workforce which we need to be prepared for.</p> <p>The Service may lose skills and experience which needs to be planned for and addressed particularly in the areas of Officer skills, Driving and Incident Command.</p> <p>The lead time to acquire skills and qualifications is generally increasing, the Service is seeing more requirements for pre-course preparation whether this be reading, reflection or completing work in</p>

	<p>advance. This time needs to be factored on top of the course input itself.</p>
<p>Corporate skills</p>	<p>Although changes will also apply to the Local Government Pensions Scheme (LGPS), the numbers affected are not currently of concern.</p> <p>The Service at times experiences difficulties in recruiting to some key corporate professionally skilled/qualified roles. This has been the case in ICT and Finance. We may need to consider building in lead and hand over time on occasion to facilitate succession planning and knowledge transfer which will have some financial implications.</p>
<p>Role of PCCs and Governance models</p>	<p>There still remains some uncertainty for the FRS nationally, combined with the number of major national and local initiatives. There are several key consultations ongoing which could impact significantly over the next 3 years around governance, inspection, and performance. Changes in Government direction and also at a more local level will potentially have an impact on how the FRS moves forward, and what decisions are made locally.</p> <p>The review of the Police and Crime Commissioner role and associated governance models may have the potential to impact on our corporate workforce and we must continue to be sighted on national and local thinking as far as possible.</p>
<p>Protection capability</p>	<p>The need for a skilled Protection capability within FRSs is clear and a requirement in the delivery of HWFRS' statutory function. The importance of this has been seen in the aftermath of national events (specifically Grenfell) and is accordingly recognised in subsequent reviews.</p> <p>HWFRS is committed to developing a strong Protection function by increasing the Protection knowledge and skills of operational personnel; and developing and expanding the skills and capacities of the specialist Protection team.</p> <p>This investment is supported by Central Government funding and NFCC direction. It should be highlighted that the lead time for achieving the relevant qualifications is a minimum of 2 years plus application of skills and ongoing CPD.</p>
<p>Attracting specialist skills and representation in all roles</p>	<p>Nationally, high potential and direct entry schemes are very topical. Attracting and evaluating individuals with aspiration, ability and engagement is a challenge, but the benefits of such schemes could help HWFRS to improve its diversity of thought and delivery as well as representation.</p> <p>The appetite to adopt such approaches is an area for further exploration within HWFRS, therefore, we will explore high potential schemes with key senior stakeholders as appropriate.</p> <p>HR and Response continue to work on positive action campaigns and these have resulted in some improvement in our sex and ethnicity profile, however there is still work to be done.</p>

	<p>Where single areas of competence/skill exist, we will seek to recruit behind to give a level of succession planning. This is particularly relevant in areas such as Finance and ICT.</p> <p>Going forward, the retirement profile means we may need to do more positive action work, to recruit new Firefighters and also support to progress our current staff in particular under-represented groups e.g. women into operational managerial roles.</p> <p>We will also continue to work with our external partners, such as Women in the Fire Service and AFSA, to promote seminars and workshops for our current staff. We will learn from our data, analysis and feedback so that we can effectively recruit to specialist roles in the corporate areas of the organisation.</p>
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We will continue to use effective workforce planning to ensure that we achieve the objectives set out in the Service’s CRMP and core strategies.

We will continue to explore new and innovative ways of working both internally and with external partners to deliver our service to the community. The suggested key workforce planning priorities for the Service for the forthcoming two years should be:

- Succession planning and bridging the skills gaps
- Managing, supporting, and delivering culture change
- Diversity in our workforce
- Workforce analysis
- National initiatives
- Leadership, management and development

Monitoring and updating of the plan

The production of an annual plan designed to determine the Service’s forthcoming staffing shortfalls should be integrated into the work programme for Workforce Planning Group and Performance Board. The workforce plan supplements the People Strategy.

Strategic Workforce Action Plan 2023-2024

Priority	Objective	Current position	Actions	Timescale	Narrative
Recruitment	Monitor attrition at Wholetime FF level to determine recruitment needs	Current WT FF campaign launched – no plans to recruit Wholetime again during 23/24. 1 WT course to commence September 2023.	Monitor levels of leavers and retirements	Duration of Workforce plan	Reassess financial position as appropriate and in line with MTFP
	Monitor attrition at On-Call FF level to determine recruitment needs	Currently monitored – On-Call Marketing project delivery Strategic leader and practitioner are involved with the On-Call NFCC workstream to improve attraction and recruitment of staff increasing availability and succession planning.	Project team to deliver On-Call Marketing project.	Duration of project plan	Evolve recruitment approach as part of project outputs
Succession Planning	Develop all WC's and CC's to Level 3 Certificate in Fire Safety	Supervisory Managers on all 30 watches are at various stages of their training, with 16 staff now complete	Qualification progression being monitored. Courses also being made available to Firefighters seeking development	All Watches to have Level 3 staff by Q1 2024/25	Training for new supervisory managers to be factored into future budgets.
	Develop all FDS Officers' Fire Safety specialisms	Complete with 8 FDS Officers qualified to L4 Diploma or above	Fire Safety now recognised as an Officer specialism ensuring skills will be	On-going	As above

Priority	Objective	Current position	Actions	Timescale	Narrative
	Maintain Fire safety Inspector competencies	Full complement of inspectors, 10 qualified and 2 finishing their training in August.	replaced should staff leave. Other qualified Officers available and being trained One WC and a Scale 5 FS Advisor appointed using Protection Grant funding. Completing L4 Diploma training in August for department succession planning.	In place in August 2023. Further succession planning on-going.	Protection Grant funding available for 2023/24 to support future succession planning.
	Recruit to establishment for WT and On-Call	1 WT course due to commence September 2023. Minimum of 4 On-Call courses planned per year. On-Call Marketing & Recruitment Project delivery	Current WT FF campaign launched 12 week recruitment model in progress As per project plan	During 2023/24 During 2023/24 As per project plan	WT campaign in progress
	Addressing incident command skills gaps	Maintain appropriate number of Level 1 Commanders	4 L1 IC courses per year planned	A L1 IC Course is 5 days in length plus a 2 hour assessment, max. numbers per course are 10.	IC courses-there is an amount of pre course work each delegate must undertake prior to attending the course.
	Maintaining Drivers (ERD)	Maintain appropriate number of ERDs	80 Driving courses per year planned	To gain ERD status a driver must complete a 1 week LGV	Changes to driving standards requires different delivery

Priority	Objective	Current position	Actions	Timescale	Narrative
				course then gain sufficient experience before completing a 10 day ERD course	models and longer course duration ERD courses include driving in the hours of darkness
	Specialist Officer skills	Maintain skills in scope include FI, NILO, HAZMAT	Plan in courses to address as part of SC and GC development programmes	In line with Training Planner and as need arises	
	Attracting hard to fill corporate roles	Identify hard to fill roles at local level	Identify single points of competence/skill/knowledge and associated risks. Where applicable, support the approach to allow overlaps for longer lead times and handovers for critical roles.	As need arises	
	Aspiring Supervisory Managers programme	Pilot programme in place	Continue to evolve offer dependent on skills required.	Review October 2023.	
	Aspiring Executive Leaders programme	Pilot programme completed.	Consider programme for the future and agree content and timescales dependent on knowledge and skills required.	Review in June 2023.	
	Evolving career conversation	Career conversation part of new appraisal process	Transition to e-appraisals (People Strategy objective)	2023/24	

Priority	Objective	Current position	Actions	Timescale	Narrative
Supporting and delivering culture change	Invest in corporate skills development such as equality and inclusion, project management, financial awareness, and political awareness, having difficult conversations /giving feedback, interviewing, managing and supporting mental health.	Formal qualifications cover relevant modules. Bespoke organisational EDI learning programme in place.	Development programmes to be aligned to Core Code of Ethics. Continue investment in appropriate development for staff including support for Personal Development.	Duration of workforce plan	People Development Manager now in post.
Diverse workforce	Increase representation of women in operational roles. Increase representation of women in leadership roles (SC and above)	Women in ops roles – 9% (8% On-Call, 11% WT) Women in managerial roles (ops): AC – 1 GC – 2 SC – 3 Women in managerial roles (corporate PO2+):	Positive action statement of intent in development. Promote Aspiring Supervisory Managers programme Positive action to be considered prior to recruitment and/or promotion processes e.g. targeted career progression workshops. Promote Aspiring Executive Leaders programme	Q1 2023/24 Q3 2023/24 following review As need to recruit arises Q3 2023/24 following review	

Priority	Objective	Current position	Actions	Timescale	Narrative
		GC equiv – 4 SC equiv – 8	<i>Develop Aspiring Middle Managers programme tbc</i>		
Data and feedback	Improve the feedback and number of exit interviews carried out to better understand how to improve attraction and retention.	Exit interview completion rates are low. Improving quantity and quality of data is a People Strategy objective for 2023/24.	Increase % or target number once HR notified of leaver.	2023/2024	
	Undertake analysis to understand trends, risks and opportunities for future workforce planning	Supply and demand analysis undertaken on a quarterly basis.	Continue to evolve content in consideration of external and internal factors.	Duration of workforce plan.	
National approaches (NFCC)	Coaching and mentoring, 360 feedback	Informal coaching and mentoring in place. NFCC has launched Coaching hub.	Introduce a coaching framework/approach across the organisation.	2023/24	
			360 feedback process for Exec Board	Q1 2023/24	In progress.
			360 feedback process for other leadership levels	Q2 2023/24	In development.
		Executive coaching available as part of Aspiring Executive Leaders programme	Undertake clear communications to the wider organisation on the commitment to this approach	Q2 2023/24	



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05/2023