WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

COLLABORATION AND TRANSFORMATION COMMITTEE

6 DECEMBER 2021

1. **COLLABORATION AND TRANSFORMATION – DIGITAL, DATA AND INNOVATION**

   Report of the Chief Fire Officer

   RECOMMENDED

   THAT Members:

   1.1   Note the considerable transformation and collaboration progress made and delivered through the COVID period.

   1.2   Acknowledge our approach through the Digital, Data and Innovation strategy and the positive impact this will have for our staff and communities.

   1.3   Note how the strategy is already being delivered through our recent Oracle Cloud Project, CRMP, Digital Transformation on Stations initiatives and Innovation Stations.

   1.4   Support our excellent potential for national collaboration opportunities and continued investment to deliver better more efficient services to our communities.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

   To provide an update around the excellent digital delivery through COVID, to introduce the West Midlands Fire Service Digital, Data and Innovation Strategy.

   To provide examples of how this is already giving value to our communities and introduce the projects that will shape and support the fire service of the future.

Ref: AU/C&T/2021/Dec/92311214

To show how our focus on collaboration has provided potential opportunities for national adoption of our Tymly system as a basis for National Fire Data Capture

3. **BACKGROUND**

3.1 **Response to COVID-19**

In March 2020 as we were entering into a worldwide pandemic there was emphasis across all public services to help their communities as much as possible. The Fire Sector provided a truly diverse range of activities including face mask fitting, delivering food parcels to the most vulnerable and vaccinating members of the public. This has led to better working relationships with our partners and an increased profile of what a modern Fire and Rescue Service can offer.

We have been able to deliver opportunities for transformation and collaboration through the pandemic. We were able to rapidly give our staff access to our systems from anywhere, delivering a remote workforce overnight.

Our investments in Office 365 helped us to deliver key information for decision making. We also were able to keep our staff informed and connected and most importantly, ensure that they all have a voice.

We took a data led approach creating systems to capture and present information to ensure we were making the right decisions through the provision of data visualisations to simplify and show many complex data sources together.

We have rapidly delivered systems and technology to keep our staff safe, through delivery of connected temperature scanners and provision of key reporting covering infection data, performance, and risk.

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) needed a robust recording mechanism to enable national and local governmental reporting. Our Tymly system that was developed by our WMFS digital and data developers was utilised to bring all this information together across all the 53 UK fire services and was delivered in a matter of days.

This enabled real-time data to be used for dynamic decision making across the UK and we also used for ministerial briefings. This system (NFCC Data Portal) has further evolved to collect even more

national information including national sickness and COVID related sickness data.

The success of the Data Portal meant that we were asked to collect data for the National Building Risk Review Project which was from the backdrop of the Grenfell Tower recommendations which has been phenomenally successful.

The data portal has around 900 registered users across all Fire and Rescue Services within the UK and collects data on:

- Additional Activities (Covid-19)
- Absence & Sickness
- Covid Testing
- PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) Stock & Usage
- Water Safety
- Fire Safety Enforcement
- Building Risk Review National Data

The Data Portal have been nominated for "Innovation of the Year" and "Collaboration" of the Year at the Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards 2021.

Building on these successes the digital, data and innovation strategy is focused on using technology and data to improve our performance, efficiency, and service to our communities. This might mean creating new systems or reimagining current processes to work in the digital world around us.
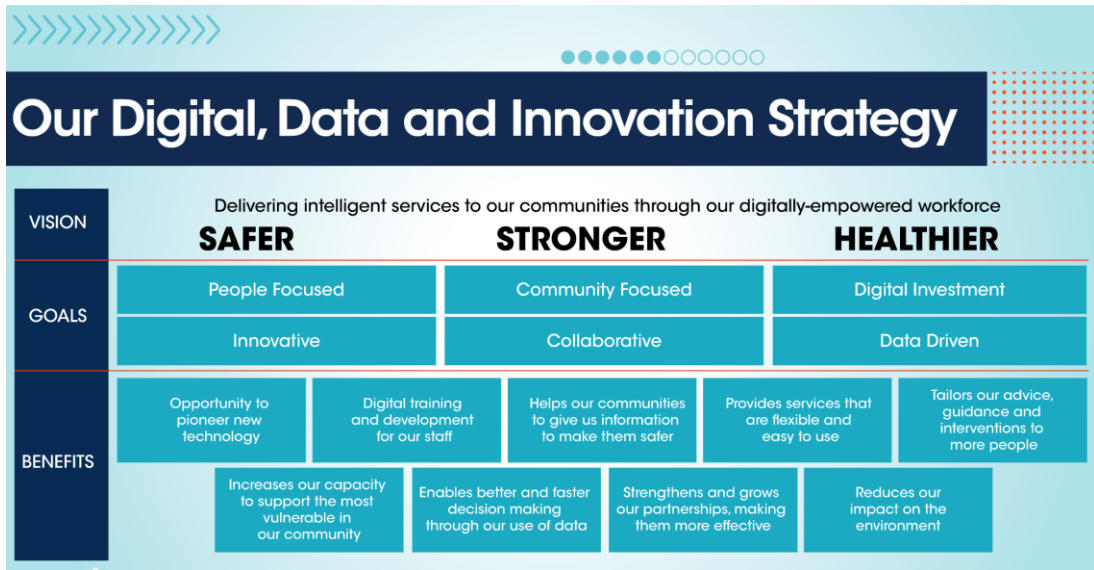
3.2 **Introducing a Digital, Data and Innovation Strategy**

We will be releasing the following short video to introduce the strategy to the service. Our focus remains on collaborating with our staff on this journey and we will be accompanying it with a digital training programme to develop skills for the future. We aim to release this towards the end of 2021 with the supporting training to follow early in the new year.

We have created a short engaging video which we would like to share with you in the meeting.

As you can hopefully see from the video, we have made a complex subject easy to understand through 6 key goals which will deliver benefits to our staff and communities.

Ref: AU/C&T/2021/Dec/92311214

The following diagram provides a useful summary and forms part of the written strategy, which will be released at the same time.

3.3 **Digital Inclusion in the West Midlands**

More than 1 in 5 people in the West Midlands do not use the internet, which is the highest rate in the UK. This has an impact as the world around them becomes more technologically advanced and they become "digitally excluded." Ensuring we have digitally skilled staff who can work to support such people will in turn ensure we are able to help all our communities.

This is not a problem we can solve in isolation, and we are collaborating with partners and charities working in this space as part of the West Midlands Digital Coalition for Digital Inclusion.

West Midlands Fire Service has been part of the working groups that have resulted in the publishing of the West Midlands Digital Roadmap.

There are opportunities for us to help our communities by keeping them connected to us as well as helping to solve wider issues that make them more vulnerable to fires. We are already providing Digital Safe and Wells to our communities which allows us to be more efficient and focus on providing more face-to-face interventions to those that need it.

We are continuing to work with partners that are part of the WMFS 5G testbed, Coventry Smart Cities, and leading suppliers on using information from sensors and new ways of gathering information to reduce risks.

Our progress has been rapid, and the strategy is making a difference to how we are working already. The following sections provide some examples show how this is happening already.

3.4 **National Impact and Collaboration**

We have always focused on collaboration and already deliver digital services to South Wales, Staffordshire and Shropshire fire, and rescue services. We are now developing our approach to increase this number. These fire – fire collaborations provide economies of scale and reduce costs for all involved and maximise public sector funding by spending it in the public sector twice.

Our approach to creating open, user and community focused systems that are delivered for the sector's benefit has enabled us to deliver a national data collection system to the NFCC through COVID, this is still in use and continues to grow.

The success of this approach has resulted in our technology being assessed by the Home Office as a basis for National Data Collection for fire.

A recent review has identified our Tymly system as the preferred option to deliver this solution. This would mean that every fire service would use our system to enter its data, which would improve collaboration and transform the way that we work with other fire and rescue services as well as provide future opportunities for funding.

We have used our influence as part of the Home Office Data Board to help widen the Home Office thinking around incident data to include information on prevention and protection. This information would be more up to date and by virtue of looking at the problem nationally would provide significant transformation across the sector.

Ref: AU/C&T/2021/Dec/92311214

3.5   **Innovation on Stations**

We have created a "digital transformation on stations" working group, bringing together a diverse team of operational firefighters to look at our working practices and have work with our technical teams to spearhead a mobile device pilot which will be trialled at five "Innovation" Stations.

This will improve firefighter safety through the ability to record incidents through body worn cameras, improve communication on the incident ground by providing key information about hazards, and give crews access to information in key policies anywhere. Firefighters will also be able to get remote help when needed from more experienced colleagues as well as see and share complex scenarios.

The devices will mean that data gets collected quickly, will reduce duplication, and streamline processes giving more capacity for other key activities. They can be used for our protection and prevention activities and allow our teams to work more closely with partners that can assist the most vulnerable in our communities. We are working with manufacturers to pioneer the use of innovative technologies in the fire sector as part of this exciting project.

A survey of our operational staff suggested that over 70% welcomed the opportunity to use this type of technology. They felt it would allow them to work and look more professional when out in the communities and deliver more. The ability to be out in the community rather than being stuck behind a computer on station has been a key message.

3.6   **Support Systems Transformation**

We have successfully delivered support systems transformation through Oracle Cloud. This project is the first step at reducing our current separate systems (around 60) to 3 platforms for the future.

1.   Oracle will provide our staff focused people, finance, and procurement systems

2.   Tymly our fire service specific fire data collection

Ref: AU/C&T/2021/Dec/92311214

3.   Office 365 our connected productivity systems so we can communicate, share, and work together.

This was a key action from the Cultural Review and HMICFRS findings and directly tackles the frustrations of our workforce. I am pleased to report that we are seeing some great feedback from staff on streamlining issues that cause them the most frustration such as claiming expenses.

We are improving trust through staff being able to see all their information in one place and ensuring that they can access essential information wherever they are.

This exciting transformation is ongoing, and we are looking to replace our remaining legacy systems in the next few years.

3.7 **Next Steps**

Our focus now turns to our emergency response systems and the paper-based incident processes we currently use. This will focus on providing flexible and more effective working for our crews and Fire Control teams. This will reduce the need to enter information multiple times and provide much better information sharing at large incidents.

I am most pleased to report that digital, data and innovation is underpinning all our CRMP proposals. This is enabling us to deliver solutions that reduce costs while delivering more for our communities.

Risk Based Crewing for example is working to ensure our systems when we are mobilising our staff are streamlined and provide key information and "eyes on" so the communities are kept safer.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report, an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been conducted.

Our progress in digital technology should be considered as having a positive effect on our neurodiverse staff. Previously we used to provide tools to help with dyslexia for example on request and not these are rolled out to all.

Ref: AU/C&T/2021/Dec/92311214

We are working with the neurodiversity working group to ensure our new digital payslips are easily understood and ensuring that our new systems are effective and easy to understand for all.

The use of digital technology will also be providing opportunities to engage people that do not have English as their first language. As we are looking to roll out more services to the public this will help with engagement but also enhance the quality of responses.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct legal implications.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications.

7. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There has been a positive shift towards our environmental policy due to the digital investments and transformed ways of working. Staff are now able to work in a hybrid way so they can be as effective if they are in the office or working remotely.

This has been enabled through technology but is supported by our agile working policy and our HQ Transformation pilot. This flexible work area brings together people from all over the service and allows them to work together and collaborate. This is supported by a desk booking system which can enforce COVID rules as needed.

This also provides opportunities for the reduction of dedicated staff areas spaces in HQ providing more opportunities for use of the space.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

Ref: AU/C&T/2021/Dec/92311214