

Report to Council

13 June 2023

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| Subject: | Report from the Council's representative on West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority |
| Director: | Surjit Tour – Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer Surjit_Tour@sandwell.gov.uk |
| Contact Officer: | Trisha Newton Trisha_newton@sandwell.gov.uk |

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Council receives updates from the Council's representative on the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority.







2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Council, at its annual meeting on 24 May 2011, approved an arrangement whereby members nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 to answer questions on the discharge of the functions of any joint authority or any joint board of which the Council is a constituent authority (Section 41 members) would report to the Council twice a year on important and contentious matters relating to the joint authority/board, and on any other occasion by exception. Procedural Standing Orders provide that any member of the Council shall be entitled to ask questions of the relevant members and the Council on these reports.

A report is attached in respect of West Midlands Fire and Rescue.



2 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

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|  |  | The involvement of Council representatives in the decision-making process of joint authorities will encourage better understanding of local and wider needs and viewpoints. |
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3 Context and Key Issues

- 3.1 Council will receive an update on the work undertaken by West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority from the member nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 It is usual practice to receive six monthly update reports.

5 Implications

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| Resources: | There are no strategic resource implications arising from this report. |
| Legal and Governance: | <p>Under Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985, arrangements have been made for enabling questions on the discharge of a joint authority's functions to be put in the course of the proceedings of any constituent district council. A member is nominated by the joint authority for that purpose (the Section 41 member).</p> <p>It is customary for the Council to receive six monthly reports from those members appointed pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 to answer questions put to them at council meetings relating to the discharge of functions of joint authorities.</p> |
| Risk: | There are no direct risks associated with this report. |



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| Equality: | There is no requirement for an equality impact assessment. |
| Health and Wellbeing: | There are no direct health and wellbeing implications from this report. |
| Social Value | There are no direct social value implications from this report. |
| Climate Change | There are no direct implications arising from this report. |
| Corporate Parenting: | There are no direct implications arising from this report. |

7. Appendices

Appendix A – West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority update.

8. Background Papers

None



WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE

Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier

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99 Vauxhall Road, Birmingham B7 4HW

**Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Section 41 Report – 2022/23
West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority**

'Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier'

Report by Cllr Rizwan Jalil

Membership of the Authority

The Members of the Authority for the Municipal Year 2022-23 were as follows:

| Local Authority | Councillor(s) |
|---|---|
| Birmingham | Councillor Zafar Iqbal* (Labour) <i>Vice-Chair</i> Councillor Gurdial Singh Atwal (Labour) Councillor Sybil Spence (Labour) Councillor David Barrie (Conservative) |
| Coventry | Councillor Catherine Miks* (Labour) Councillor Gavin Lloyd# (Labour) |
| Dudley | Councillor Ian Kettle* (Conservative) Councillor Peter Miller (Conservative) |
| Sandwell | Councillor Rizwan Jalil* (Labour) Councillor Zahir Hussain (Labour) |
| Solihull | Councillor Peter Hogarth MBE* (Conservative) |
| Walsall | Councillor Vera Waters* (Conservative) Councillor Ann Young (Labour) |
| Wolverhampton | Councillor Greg Brackenridge* (Labour) <i>Chair</i> Councillor Jas Dehar (labour) |
| Additional Member(s) | |
| Independent Member of the Audit and Risk Committee | Mr Mike Ager |
| Independent Member of Appointments, Standards and Appeals | Mr R Tomkinson (Standards Committee only) |
| Co-opted Members of the Authority | Professor Simon Brake Sarah Middleton |
| Police and Crime Commissioner: Represented by (if applicable): | Simon Foster Assistant PCC Wasim Ali Richard Castello – Head of Communications |

* Section 41 member

Replaced Cllr Seamus Walsh as of 10 October 2022

Service Performance against Strategic Plan

Response times to the most critical and high-risk incidents were within target and attendance times remained within target across all four categories of incident, with performance remaining significantly below the respective targets for category 2, 3 & 4 incident types.

The majority of Service level performance indicators are within target and within the tolerance levels.

The number of accidental dwelling fires that have been recorded are below target and below the lower tolerance level and are the lowest number of incidents recorded in three years.

The number of deliberate fires in derelict buildings is above target and above the upper tolerance level. Due to their nature, these types of incidents are generally focussed in certain areas across the West Midlands, based on local geographic circumstances. The Service remains committed to working in conjunction with Local Authorities and other partners to secure derelict premises, to reduce the number of these types of incidents.

The number of false alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment is above target and above the upper tolerance level. The Service's Automatic Fire Alarm Policy to challenge calls reporting fire alarms actuating enables effective management of resources and reduces the number of responses to non-domestic and commercial premises that otherwise would be wasted. However, approximately 80% of all incidents result from domestic premises, rather than the site itself or commercial premises. Our Fire Safety Officers and operational crews are working together to engage with and educate residents around key areas such as cooking, smoking or vapor creating, supported through the delivery of Safe and Well visits where applicable, with the aim to reduce the number of calls.

| Indicator | Target | Performance |
|--|--|--|
| Risk Based Attendance Standard | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Category 1 (high risk) – 5 minutes Category 2 – 7 minutes Category 3 – 10 minutes Category 4 – 20 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Category 1 – 04:48 Category 2 – 05:30 Category 3 – 04:59 Category 4 – 06:54 |
| Accidental dwelling fires | 1573 | 1486 (-5.5%) – overperformance |
| Injuries from accidental fires in dwellings (requiring hospital treatment) | 48 | 51 (+6.3%) – performance on track |
| Safe & Well points achieved by the Brigade (visits to higher risk people bring a bigger point score) | 260,000 | 246,251 (-5.3%) - underperformance Average Assessment Points 7.52 |
| Deliberate fires in dwellings | 195 | 182 (-6.7%) – performance on track |

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| Deliberate rubbish fires | 1366 | 1352 (-1.0%) – performance on track |
| Deliberate fires in derelict buildings | 114 | 135 (+18.4%) - underperformance |
| Accidental fires in non-domestic premises | 384 | 364 (-5.2%) – performance on track |
| False alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment | 5825 | 6752 (+15.9%) - underperformance |

Note: the figures are correct at the time of writing and are subject to change as data is further interrogated.

Local Authority performance and key statistics

In addition to the service level performance indicators above, specific statistics are available for the Sandwell area for Q3 and Q4 2022/23. As these are the latest figures, they are subject to change as data is further interrogated.

| Indicator | Performance | Notes |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Accidental Dwelling Fires | 169 | 10% below target and below the three-year average. |
| Deliberate Rubbish Fires | 146 | Below target and below the three-year average. |
| False Alarms (Equipment) | 612 | Above target and above the three-year average. |
| Safe and Wells completed | 4138 (42.2% partner referrals) | Although below target (45%), increases in the percentage of referrals have been observed during the latter half of 2022/23, reflecting the change in approach focussing on quality referral pathway building and nurturing relationships to increase the number of referrals for those who the Service's Community Risk Management Plan identifies as being most at risk and vulnerable to fire. |
| Average Assessment Points* | 7.57 | The average assessment points remain positive. |

** Assessment points measure the vulnerability of the individual or family we undertake a SAW with – the more vulnerable someone is, the more points that visit will garner. WMFS is committed to targeting our interventions at the most vulnerable in our communities.*

WMFS activities during the last six months

1. West Midlands Fire Service HMICFRS inspection report finds service to be “Outstanding” in three areas.

[In January 2023 WMFS received its second HMICFRS inspection report](#) and was delighted to receive an Outstanding rating for overall effectiveness, as well as for our understanding of fire and other risks. The Service also retained its Outstanding rating for responding to fires and other emergencies, while receiving a Good rating in all other areas.

This outcome meant the service is amongst the top performing in the country and has made significant improvements since the last round of inspections in 2018/19.

[Chief Fire Officer, Wayne Brown, said:](#) “Our three ‘outstanding’ assessments from HMICFRS are testament to the hard work of staff across West Midlands Fire Service and their dedication to making our communities safer, stronger and healthier. Our improvements in values, culture and development are key to supporting our staff. The better they’re cared for, the better they can keep our communities safe. Our continued improvement stems from their diligence and innovation.”

Cllr Greg Brackenridge, Chair of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority, said: “The dedication of WMFS to continually improve is plain to see within the contents of this report. I'm proud to see that the work put in over the last three years to adapt the way that we deliver means that the people of the West Midlands can be assured but if they need the fire service, they will be in the best possible hands. All this amounts to a first-class fire and rescue service for our area, and we should feel fortunate to have such dedicated people keeping us safe.”

2. Appointment of new Chief Fire Officer

In November 2022, Phil Loach QFSM [announced his retirement](#), following nine years as Chief Fire Officer, leaving the service in January 2023.

Wayne Brown, who had served as Deputy Chief Fire Officer since 2019 and led the service as interim CFO following Phil’s departure, [was announced as the service’s permanent new CFO in April 2023](#) following a thorough application and interview process led by West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority’s Appointments Committee.

Councillor Greg Brackenridge, Chair of WMFRA, said of the appointment: “I and the rest of the Committee members were very impressed by Wayne’s vision for the Service, and we are confident he will continue to provide the excellent leadership the service requires to build on our existing successes and help us meet the challenges of the coming years.”

CFO Brown said; “It is my privilege to have been appointed on a permanent basis. I’m very much looking forward to building on, and enhancing, WMFS’s hard-earned position as one of the country’s leading and most respected fire and rescue services.”

3. WMFRA Annual Plan Published

In April 2023, WMFRA published its latest three year strategy, “[Our Plan](#)”, setting out the service’s priorities and plans to make the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier. Our Plan commits the service to driving further improvement across five areas:

- Prevention - Delivering interventions which support safer and healthier communities.
- Protection - Protecting life and property to make businesses stronger and communities safer.
- Response - Dealing excellently with incidents, including responding within five minutes to the highest risk incidents.
- People - Making West Midlands Fire Service a great place to work for the benefit of our communities and our people.
- Digital and Data - Providing intelligent services to our communities through our digitally-empowered workforce.

Our Plan is informed by our ongoing [Community Risk Management Plan \(CRMP\)](#) process, which is how we assess all the current and future risks facing our communities. This influences how we set our priorities and, in turn, helps us determine what specific projects we need to implement to address these risks.

4. Budget and Precept 2023-2024 and Budget Forecast 2024-2025 to 2025-2026

At the Fire Authority meeting on 13 February 2023, [the Authority approved the service’s budget](#) for 2023-2024 of £119.109 million. This included a Council Tax increase of £4.99 for Band D properties, which had been supported by District Leaders at a meeting with the Authority on 25 January 2023. Even with this increase, the service continues to be the lowest precepting authority in the country.

While the 2023-24 budget includes a welcome increase in funding it comes after over a decade of austerity leading to reductions in central government funding to fire and rescue services and to WMFS in particular. Even with this latest set of increases, total funding to the service is no higher than it was in cash terms in 2010/11.

As with all public services, WMFRA continues to face ongoing budget uncertainties and pressures arising from the cost-of-living crisis, particularly pay awards and inflation impacting on utilities and equipment costs. The service expects to make efficiency savings of approximately £1.9 million within the next year in order to balance our budget.

The authority and its members continue to lobby the government on the funding issues facing the service and the need for a longer-term financial settlement, following another single-year agreement.

5. UKISAR deployments to Türkiye and Malawi

West Midlands Fire Service specialists took part in two UKISAR deployments over the past six months, starting with rescue efforts following [the devastating earthquake that affected Türkiye and Syria](#) in February. Eight WMFS team members joined the team of 77 rescue experts from 14 different UK FRS, spending over a week in Türkiye rescuing a number of people trapped in collapsed structures and offering medical support. WMFS also hosted the coordination centre for the deployment from our Headquarters in Birmingham, providing around the clock support to crews on the ground.

Just a month later, the team were deployed again, this time as part of the international response [to widespread flooding in Malawi](#) and across other parts of southern Africa caused by Cyclone Freddy. Our staff formed part of a 27-strong team who undertook rescues of hundreds of trapped and stranded families, also providing medical care to those in need.

6. WMFS named the UK's most inclusive employer

West Midlands Fire Service was proud and honoured to have been named the [UK's Most Inclusive Employer 2022/2023](#) by Inclusive Companies in December 2022. The Inclusive Top 50 UK Employers List focuses on best practice across all areas of diversity including: age, disability, gender, LGBT+, race, faith and religion.

7. Ramadan Buddying experience

To help raise awareness and support colleagues within the Service observing Ramadan, the service organised an event for members of staff to have the opportunity to pair up with a member of staff observing Ramadan to experience a day of fasting. The event took place on Friday 24 March from 9am to 6:30pm and was hugely successful. Those taking part were invited to attend the West Midlands Fire Service Headquarters to open their fast together, with local community leaders/Mosques leaders attending.

National Fire and Rescue Service developments

8. HMICFRS Spotlight on Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services

Following the [independent cultural review of London Fire Brigade](#), which found examples of bullying, racism and misogyny within the service, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) undertook [a "Spotlight Review" of culture and values across the whole of the Fire and Rescue Service](#). This report drew on two rounds of HMICFRS inspections of all English fire and rescue services as well as submissions and reports made directly to the inspectorate. It was published on 30 March 2023.

The final report made for difficult reading, finding examples of bullying and inappropriate behaviour from every fire and rescue service. It made 35 recommendations to Chief Fire Officers, the LGA, NFCC and Home Office across a range of areas including vetting, discipline, diversity, inclusion, and governance.

[CFO Wayne Brown accepted the findings and recommendations of the review in full](#), with work already having begun in many areas even before the publication of the report. CFO Brown said; "As Chief Fire Officer, I find the report a difficult read. It cites reports of widespread bullying, harassment, discrimination, misogyny, racism and homophobia across our sector. It is offensive that some have dismissed such behaviour as 'banter'.

"Our recent HMICFRS report graded us as 'Good' in our approach to People, including: promoting the right values and culture; getting the right people with the right skills; ensuring fairness and promoting diversity; managing performance and developing leaders. I said at the time that we've worked exceptionally hard to achieve this recognition from our national inspectorate, and do not take it for granted. We have set ourselves incredibly high standards. Our challenge now is to continue to meet and exceed them."

9. Chief Inspector's "State of Fire" Report

In January 2023, Andy Cooke QPM, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services, published his first ["State of Fire" annual report](#). The report recognised the dedication of firefighters and fire service staff, while also recognising the ongoing challenges around culture and values.

It also called on government to move forward with reforms to the sector that had been long called for by the Inspectorate and had formed part of the Fire Reform White Paper published in March 2022. This included:

- precisely determining the role of fire and rescue services, to remove any ambiguity.
- removing unjustifiable variation between services, including in how they define risk.
- reviewing how effectively pay and conditions are determined; and
- investing chief fire officers with operational independence, whether through primary legislation or in some other manner.

10. Fire Safety (England) Regulation 2022 come into force

New Fire Safety Regulations, brought in as a result of the Grenfell Tragedy and the findings of the resulting inquiry, came into force in January 2023. [The Fire Safety \(England\) Regulations 2022](#) place new expectations and requirements onto responsible persons for mid- and high-rise premises, as well as ensuring that Fire and Rescue Services receive more up to date information on building lay out and construction materials to aid in the event of a fire.