



WMFS
**West Midlands
Fire Service**

**Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
October 2024**

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

'Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier'

Report by Cllr Rizwan Jalil

Membership of the Authority

The Member of the Authority for 2024-25 is as follows:

| Local Authority | Councillor(s) |
|---|--|
| Birmingham | Councillor Basharat Mahmood* (Labour) Councillor Gurdial Singh Atwal (Labour) Councillor David Barrie (Conservative) Councillor Hendrina Quinnen (Labour) |
| Coventry | Councillor Catherine Miks* (Labour) Councillor Gavin Lloyd (Labour) |
| Dudley | Councillor Adam Aston* (Labour) Councillor Cathryn Bayton (Labour) |
| Sandwell | Councillor Rizwan Jalil* (Labour) Councillor Khayam Khan ⁺ (Labour) |
| Solihull | Councillor Peter Hogarth MBE* (Conservative) |
| Walsall | Councillor Ken Ferguson* (Conservative) Councillor Simran Cheema (Labour) |
| Wolverhampton | Vacant [#] (Labour) Councillor Jasbinder 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 Dave Brown |
| Police and Crime Commissioner: Represented by (if applicable): | Simon Foster Assistant PCC Wasim Ali |

* Section 41 member

+ Cllr Khan replaced Cllr Bill Gavan on 30 July 2024

Cllr Greg Brackenridge resigned as Chair and from the Authority on 12 October 2024

Service Performance against Strategic Plan 2024/25

WMFS set a wide range of key performance indicators, supporting a holistic view of how the Service is performing against the delivery of its strategic goals and contributing to making the West Midlands safe, stronger, and healthier. The following is a snapshot of our key performance indicators providing a focus on our operational delivery.

Please note that the performance at the time of writing is complete up to and including August 2024, but there may remain some outstanding Incident Workbooks which could result in incremental changes to the figures when reporting against quarter two in full.

| 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"> 04:48 05:27 05:03 06:30 |
| Accidental dwelling fires | 610 (tolerance 580 – 622) | 553 – performance on track |
| Injuries from accidental fires in dwellings (requiring hospital treatment) | 23 (19 – 25) | 22 – performance on track |
| Total Safe & Wells carried out by the Service (visits to higher risk people bring a bigger point score) | 4,258 | 3736 – underperformance |
| Deliberate fires in dwellings | 81 (65 – 89) | 72 – performance on track |
| Deliberate rubbish fires | 674 (607 – 707) | 620 – performance on track |
| Deliberate fires in derelict buildings | 89 (81 – 93) | 69 – performance on track |
| Accidental fires in non-domestic premises | 150 (135 – 157) | 129 – overperformance |
| False alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment problems in dwellings | 2154 (2047 – 2197) | 2596 – underperformance |
| False alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment problems in non-domestic premises | 531 (505 – 542) | 541 – performance on track |

Local Authority performance and key statistics

In addition to the service level performance indicators above, specific statistics are available for the Sandwell MBC area for Quarters 1 & 2 up to and including 31 August 2024. As these are the latest figures, they are subject to change as data is further interrogated.

| Indicator | Performance | Notes |
|---|--------------|--|
| Accidental Dwelling Fires | 67 incidents | Performance is within the tolerance levels and 11.8% below the target of 76 incidents. |
| Deliberate Rubbish Fires | 64 incidents | Performance is below the lower tolerance level and 20% below the target of 80 incidents. |
| False Alarms (Equipment) – Dwellings | 213 | Performance is over the upper tolerance level and 16.9% above the target of 213 incidents. |
| False Alarms (Equipment) – Non-domestic | 48 | Performance is below the lower tolerance level and 20.8% below the target of 38 incidents. |
| Safe and Wells completed | 578 | Performance on track 405 were classified as “high risk” |

WMFS news and activities

1. Authority Governance issues and resignations

The Chief Executive Officer resigned recently, having raised concerns relating to governance arrangements within the authority. In response, the Fire and Rescue Authority requested that His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) undertake a specific review of governance within the service. This is expected to take place in the coming months. The Authority and service have also requested support from the LGA and National Fire Chiefs Council to support the continued effective running of the service and provide reassurance to local communities.

The Chair of the Authority also recently stood down from their role. A new appointment will be made by the Authority at its next full meeting.

[Read Cllr Catherine Miks’ statement regarding these matters made on 14 October 2024.](#)

2. Appointment of new CEO/CFO

A process to appoint a permanent Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive Officer began in early September 2024, and will conclude with interviews by the Appointments Committee in late October and confirmation by the full Fire Authority in mid-November. This process is being supported by expert external recruitment agency Gatenby Sanderson, and the HMICFRS.

3. HMICFRS Inspection

Aside from the previously mentioned Governance Review to be undertaken by HMICFRS, the service will be subject to a usual biannual inspection by the HMICFRS. This will last from late October to early January, and cover all areas of the service, with a focus on effectiveness, efficiency and people.

Delivering a first class, transparent HMICFRS Inspection has been identified as a priority for the service. This includes a focus on ensuring absolute transparency and honesty throughout the inspection process, providing the opportunity for as many of our staff to be involved, and using the inspection to highlight our strengths as well as identify opportunities for improvement.

[Read more about the HMICFRS process and our previous inspection outcome here](#)

4. Doubling of e-bike fires prompts safety warning from West Midlands Fire Service

Firefighters from WMFS responded to 100 per cent more incidents involving e-bike fires and e-scooter fires last year, compared to 2022. In 2023, WMFS crews tackled 24 fires involving e-bikes and e-scooters, compared to 12 in 2022. The causes involved overheating batteries, faulty equipment and users not charging their devices correctly.

[Emily Fernandez, Head of Prevention at WMFS, said:](#) “We are seeing a concerning increase in fires caused by batteries found in e-bikes and e-scooters across the West Midlands.

“During 2023, West Midlands Fire Service responded to 100 per cent more incidents involving e-bikes and e-scooters. As their popularity increases, we will continue educating our communities on the risks and how to stay safe.”

[Read WMFS's e-bike safety page](#)

5. Gender Pay Gap

WMFS has again recorded its lowest gender pay gap since records started in 2017. The gap is the difference between average earnings for men and women. As of 31 March 2024, it stood at 5.5 per cent – down from 6.1 per cent a year ago.

Although the publication of pay gap figures based on ethnicity is not a statutory requirement, WMFS has been analysing this data for a number of years. This year, again, there has been a positive shift in the difference between the average hourly rate of pay for white staff and colleagues who are Black, Asian or from a minority background. The gap has narrowed, from 4.7 per cent a year ago to 3.5 per cent.

[Read more here](#)

6. Success for Staffordshire and West Midlands Fire Control at Control Room Awards 2024

Staffordshire and West Midlands Fire Control (SWMFC) proved they're 'heroes in headsets' at the annual Control Room Awards on 18 July. At the event in Stoke-on-Trent, SWMFC secured two accolades, displaying the commitment, skill and resilience of all staff who work in our control room.

Group Manager Kelly Whitmore, Head of SWMFC, won in the Control Room Ambassador of the Year category. This nomination reflected Kelly's excellence in leadership.

Aaron Pell and Nikki Smith won the Control Room Call Taker of Year award. Their efforts were recognised after they and ambulance control colleagues calmly and expertly mobilised crews to a casualty who was on fire.

Firefighter (Control) Tracy Halloran was nominated in the Community Champion category for her community work, which includes a host of fundraising efforts for a local foodbank.

[Read more about the awards here.](#)

National Fire and Rescue Service developments

7. Thematic Review of Conduct and Discipline

In August 2024, HMICFRS published their thematic review of “Standards of Behaviour: the handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services”. They undertook the review between October 2023 and January 2024, and carried out detailed inspections of ten FRSs: Cornwall, Dorset and Wiltshire, Greater Manchester, Humberside, Kent, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Staffordshire, Tyne and Wear, and West Midlands. They also analysed data on conduct and discipline for all 44 English FRS. The report produced 15 recommendations, and Roy Wilsher, the lead inspector for the review, concluded that “Overall, the picture we have found is that services are prioritising tackling misconduct and are making some progress. But many services still have more to do.”

WMFS have welcomed the reports findings and has put in place an action plan to ensure delivery against all recommendations.

[Read the full report here.](#)

8. Grenfell Phase Two Report

After years of evidence gathering, the Grenfell Tower Inquiry published its Phase Two report on 4 September 2024. This follows the publication of the Phase One report in 2019. Phase One focused on the factual narrative of the events on the night of 14 June 2017, while Phase Two of the Inquiry examined the causes of these events, including how Grenfell Tower came to be in a condition which allowed the fire to spread. The Phase Two report contains numerous recommendations for government, regulators, industry, local authorities and fire services.

West Midlands Fire Service has taken decisive action to implement all relevant recommendations of the Grenfell Inquiry’s Phase One report. This has since focused on embedding and seeking continuous improvement in those areas, including:

- comprehensively rewriting our tall buildings policy and procedures. These cover the survival guidance given to 999 callers by our fire control staff, evacuation and stairwell protection, and we have updated all relevant training
- fitting of building information plates to all residential tall buildings in the West Midlands
- introduction of comprehensive Site-Specific Risk Information guidance and processes for our firefighters
- introduction of fire escape hoods for people to wear when being evacuated by our crews
- introduction of smoke-stopping curtains to reduce smoke travel and aid evacuation.

While we are confident in the steps we have taken so far, we recognise that there is still much more work to be done, as is our duty, and the Phase Two report will guide much of this. The journey to safer communities is ongoing, and we remain committed to working with the National Fire Chiefs Council to continuously learn, adapt, and improve our services.

[Read the full report or executive summary here.](#)

[Read WMFS's response to the report's publication here.](#)