

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**11 DECEMBER 2023****1. PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT (3PT)**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT the contents of the report be noted.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides a summary of the progression of the delivery of Portfolio Management towards delivering 'Our Plan'. The updates provided are based on the continual assessment of investment and business benefits of projects being delivered through the three Programmes of Community Risk Reduction, Enabling Services and People.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 To inform Members of the approach taken under Portfolio Management and the resulting outcomes of the workstreams within current Programmes and Projects, which support the Service to deliver continuous improvement and transformation.
- 3.2 This report will lead into the subsequent Fire Authority reports that support the delivery of the Strategy in one or more of the Programmes.

4. DELIVERABLES

- 4.1 The Programme Executives (Brigade Managers) are accountable to the Portfolio Executive (Chief Fire Officer (CFO)) through their programme objectives to deliver the Strategy of the WMFS. The Portfolio is led by the CFO to enable the delivery of the Authority's Strategic priorities, aligned to Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) objectives.
- 4.2 The Portfolio is ultimately accountable for the Programmes and will provide assurance that the aims and objectives are being achieved. The Programmes are accountable for Projects.

- 4.3 The recent Programme achievements are detailed below and supported through the Programme deliverables.

5. **COMMUNITY REDUCTION RISK PROGRAMME (CRR)-
HIGHLIGHTS**

5.1 **Protection**

- 5.1.1 Protection have been leading on the CRMP Automatic fire alarms (AFA's) mobilising project and have already made changes to ensure we mobilise a proportionate level of response to Hospitals. This has now been extended to ensure Fire Control send a proportionate level of response to AFA's at Care Homes.
- 5.1.2 WMFS are leading the regional building safety regulator team and are working in collaboration with the Health and Safety executive as the new regulator under the building safety act to ensure all our new and existing building are safe. The new Fire Safety England regulations came into force earlier in 2023. WMFS continue to receive building plans from the responsible person. Those who are yet to provide the required information have received a letter from the head of protection reminding them of their responsibilities under the legislation.
- 5.1.3 Our Protection teams are now digitally enabled and one of the first FRS's to be completing their fire Safety Audits digitally. This builds capacity for our inspectors to spend more time working in the community targeting high risk properties

5.2 **Operations**

- 5.2.1 In July 2023 we received the sad news regarding Crew Manager Iain Hughes from Wednesbury Fire Station who lost his life swimming the English Channel whilst raising money for three charities: The Firefighters' Charity, Midlands Air Ambulance and The British Heart Foundation. We have been notified that as a result of Iain's actions he has been nominated for a number of national awards for the over £80k he raised for charity. These awards include being shortlisted for the Excellence in Fire Awards due to be held in London on 1st December 2023 and a special award at the AFSA Awards to be held in Leeds.

- 5.2.2 In September, the unblur trial was rolled out to Birmingham Fire Stations. Unblur supports front-line first responders to make safer and faster decisions on the incident ground through providing greater situation awareness supporting decision making, team coordination, and easy & transparent post-incident reporting. The trial will run for six months before a decision is made as to whether to adopt the software across all our stations and on our incident command unit.

5.3 **Prevention**

5.3.1 Arson conviction

WMFS Fire investigation and Prevention Section (FIPS) provide fire investigation services to Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service. On 9th February 2023, Staffordshire Fire Service mobilised to a house fire in Stoke on Trent. Fire crews extinguished a severe fire within the kitchen of the property before locating the body of a woman.

FIPS conducted a full excavation of the scene, and it was determined the fire had been set deliberately. A man was arrested and charged with murder and making threats to kill. FIPS supplied a total of four reports to police and in October 2023 gave evidence at Stafford Crown Court.

The man was found guilty of both murder and making threats to kill and was subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum term of 28 years. Staffordshire Police have thanked us for our assistance in this case and the CFO of Staffordshire FRS has passed on his thanks for the "great work from everyone involved in this tragic incident"

5.3.2 Lithium-Ion Batteries

Following recent incidents both in the West Midlands and across the country, updated guidance has been published on the risks linked to the use of Lithium-Ion batteries. These rechargeable batteries are used to power numerous devices, including phones, laptops, cameras, e-scooters, e-bikes, mobility scooters, wheelchairs, and vaping devices.

The website provides advice and guidance on the recognising warning signs, safety tips and charging advice and disposal of lithium-ion batteries. The link to the website is:
<https://www.wmfs.net/safety/rechargeable-lithium-ion-batteries/>

5.3.3 Safeside

The Safeside facility at HQ comprises a full-size street including, a house, shop, police station, road, canal, bus, and train. It is used for school groups to visit to learn about safety in a realistic environment.

When Safeside is not booked for school visits it also provides a valued training venue for several partner agencies. Most recently Birmingham Community Health Care NHS Foundation Trust has utilised the conference room, meeting rooms and Safety Village to support staff training, and have booked several sessions into 2024. This kind of collaboration helps to promote our facilities and fosters an increased mutual understanding of the work of both organisations, with the potential for future partnership working, as well as income for Safeside.

5.4 Fire Control

5.4.1 Recruits Course

A new group of 7 Trainee Firefighters (Control) have completed their initial training course and are now continuing their development on their respective watches. This was an extended course which incorporated additional elements around values, behaviours, culture, and inclusion. This is now being evaluated to support learning and further improvement.

5.4.2 Artificial Intelligence (AI) Training Tool Trial

Fire Control are now trialling a new Artificial Intelligence Call Handling Training Tool. The adoption of this cutting-edge training tool has the potential to elevate the efficiency and effectiveness of our fire control operators, leading to improved emergency response times and ultimately ensuring the safety of our communities. The tool is an AI-based communication simulator that can be used to develop communication skills, enhance confidence levels, reduce stress, free up mental capacity for active listening, call resolution and dynamic

mobilising. The simulator enables control personnel to handle a high volume and range of call types to support rapid skill development and confidence in role. The technology provides a platform that control staff can log in to, both in a training environment and whilst in Fire Control, to practice handling the wide variety of call types that they may encounter in the real world.

5.5 **Response**

5.5.1 **United Kingdom International Search and Rescue (UKISAR) Deployment to Morocco**

Following the devastating 6.8 magnitude earthquake, impact, and subsequent loss of life in Morocco on the 8 September 2023, 7 members of West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) deployed to Morocco as part of the UKISAR team response. During the deployment, they conducted several missions. These included searches across multiple areas in the Atlas Mountains, reporting back humanitarian needs assessments after gaining access to remote villages and conducting aerial searches of remote regions. Volunteers also administered first aid to those in need.

5.5.2 **United Kingdom Rescue Organisation (UKRO) Festival of Rescue 2023**

This year 5 of our teams took part at UKRO Festival of Rescue 2023. Hosted this year by Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue, this national rescue and trauma competition saw many UK fire services competing in a range of challenges which included vehicle extrication, rope rescue, trauma care and water rescue.

We are so proud of the superb effort from Northfield Blue Watch, Hay Mills Blue Watch, West Bromwich mixed team, the Technical Rescue team, and our West Bromwich Fire Cadets. An incredible mix of experience & skills were displayed during this great learning experience, representing WMFS excellently & professionally in challenging situations & complex scenarios.

6. **ENABLING SERVICES PROGRAMME (ES) – HIGHLIGHTS**

6.1 **Digital & Data**

We have moved forward with our business led approach to Oracle, this will put the needs of our service users and helping them through the change at the forefront of any further developments. Several areas still remain to be developed which we wish to progress with to increase our efficiency and effectiveness, through acknowledging our journey so far this will be set at a pace that's more suitable for our teams.

Our time attendance replacement system has progressed successfully into the testing phase. We now need to confirm details of the levels of automation the new system will bring and continue the testing journey into the creation and delivery of a robust training plan.

We continue to invest in our digital infrastructure and ongoing projects to deliver mobile devices to our frontline crews are being rolled out across our Birmingham Command area. Enhancements to connectivity and our server infrastructure continue to enable our service delivery.

6.2 **Corporate Communications**

In September 2023 WMFS had 2 stands at the Emergency Services Show where we exhibited a number of services which we provide that makes the West Midlands safer, stronger and healthier. This included future technology, Health & Wellbeing and Road Casualty Reduction. In addition, Luna, our Urban Search & Rescue dog also made a guest appearance. Alongside our stand we also carried out a number of challenges that were filmed live across the show. These included:

- Large Goods Vehicle Extrication – Techniques and Safety Systems
- Animal Rescue
- Rope Rescue
- Cadet Patient Care Challenges Teams
- Trauma and Extrication new techniques and/or procedures – 10 second triage or vehicle relocation
- Fire Dog demonstration

In October 2023 we celebrated Black History Month which aims to address unfairness and celebrate the history, achievements, and contributions of black communities. The theme this year was 'Saluting our sisters' and paid homage to black women who had their contributions ignored.

In one of our pieces of communication on this subject Crew Manager Sonia Stoney and Firefighter Natalie Gilead shared their experiences of growing up, their family's histories, what it was like joining WMFS and much more. This can be seen by clicking on the link below

<https://wmfs.sharepoint.com/sites/People/SitePages/Black-History-Month---Our-Latest-Video.aspx?web=1>

16th November 2023, saw the Service's annual flagship reward and recognition event held at The International Convention Centre (ICC) in Birmingham where many teams and individuals were thanked and recognised for their efforts in making the West Midlands safer, stronger and healthier, and also for (ISAR's) multiple deployments this year.

It was also a moment not only for our staff to be thanked, but also to their families and loved ones for their commitment and support.

6.3 **Finance and Procurement**

Several training sessions have been held with managers across the organisation to share key information and actions in finance and procurement. These have been well received and will aid the journey towards improved business partnering, forecasting and consistency.

Preparations are underway for budget setting 2024/25 following meetings with budget holders and senior managers. Future budget requirements have been reviewed, identifying pressures and efficiencies.

7. PEOPLE PROGRAMME – HIGHLIGHTS

7.1 Thematic Inspection

The Home Secretary has commissioned His Majesty's Inspectorate of Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to undertake a thematic inspection of the handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services in England. This commission builds on the findings in the spotlight report on culture and values in the fire and rescue sector published in March 2023.

The terms of reference for this inspection, include:

- The extent to which services are identifying and investigating misconduct.
- The effectiveness of misconduct processes and how consistently they are applied.
- How confident fire and rescue service staff are in raising concerns and in misconduct processes.
- The role of fire and rescue authorities and other organisations in handling misconduct.

To support the inspection, HMICFRS will survey and request data from all 44 Fire and Rescue Services, as well as inspecting a sample of ten Fire and Rescue Services to understand the handling of misconduct more thoroughly.

WMFS has been selected as one of the 10 sample services and will be welcoming HMICFRS into the service between Monday, 4th December 2023 to Friday, 22nd December 2023. The 3-week inspection will include document, data and case file reviews, focus group discussions and Director and Heads of interviews.

HMICFRS will initially provide a hot debrief to the service in January 2024, prior to publishing an overall report capturing the collective findings of all 10 sample services in June 2024.

In preparation for our inspection, HMICFRS have issued an all-staff survey which is currently open for all staff to complete.

7.2 **People Support**

7.2.1 **Policy Development**

We have made excellent progress with our people policy development, launching our updated attendance management and disciplinary policies. Feedback on both policies has been positive. We are currently in consultation to update our dignity at work and grievance policies, with these being launched in early December 23.

7.2.2 **Family leave**

We have launched our improved family leave provision with our service being the first service within the UK to offer 52 weeks paid leave for those taking maternity or adoption leave. In addition, we have extended our paternity provision to 2 weeks' paid leave. We are currently in consultation with our trade unions.

7.2.3 **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks**

We have started to implement DBS checks across the service with all employees now invited to complete their check. At the time of writing this report, 79% of employees either have DBS checks in place or are in the process of completing their check. We are ahead of plan to have all DBS's in place by the end of November 2023.

7.2.4 **Pay & Grading Review**

We have commenced our pay and grading review of Green Book pay and grading principles and processes. We are working with an external partner to complete an initial review and evaluation of our current practices with an anticipated completion date of this phase being the end of January 2024. Phase 2 will explore and model options. Further information will be provided as the programme of work commences.

7.3 **Organisational Learning and People Development**

7.3.1 **People Development**

7.3.1.1 **Trainee Firefighter Development Programme**

The newly improved 12-week Trainee Firefighter Development Programme (TFDP) has just completed its first course with trainee fire fighters (including trainee Fire Control Operators) passing out at the beginning of November 2023. The TFDP is monitored and evaluated as the course progresses to support learning and further improvement. Initial outcomes from the evaluation are showing positive overall and are highlighting areas for improvement to support future courses.

7.3.1.2 **Career Development Pathways**

Career Development Pathways is an inclusive approach to enabling the development of staff. This will provide all staff with a standardised approach to accessing information, development material and recording mechanisms to support their progression into supervisory and middle management roles across the Service.

In response to staff feedback this approach can be personalised to an individual's development path and supports the achievement of our people priorities. Career Development Pathways is due to be launched in early 2024 and will be further developed during 2024/25, to ensure an inclusive employee lifecycle.

Career Development Pathways also supports the achievement and progression of several of the HMICFRS Spotlight Report recommendations.

7.3.1.3 **Breathing Apparatus (BA) training**

Training for the issue of the new BA sets in 2024, is currently underway to support the upskilling of all operational staff in the wearing and use of this began at an early stage during October 2023 and will be completed by the 16th of December 2023. To date we have trained 600 operational staff (approx. 46% of all users) and are on track for completion.

We have ensured a dedicated approach to this training with a global training plan and guidance provided to support the face-to-face training. Early planning around this has meant that we are unlikely to be affected by the shortages in training equipment which is now anticipated as other fire services plan their training.

7.3.2 **Diversity Inclusion Cohesion and Equality (DICE)**

7.3.2.1 Stakeholder Groups

A planning day took place with Stakeholder Groups on 29th November 2023 to support a wide discussion regarding the key outcomes for the organisation and staff over the coming 2 months. With a specific focus being on how the organisation and groups can work together to achieve these.

7.3.2.2 DICE events

The organisation celebrated and engaged in several DICE events over the quarter including (not exclusively) Black History Month – ‘Saluting our sisters’, Islamophobia - enabling an awareness of religion and, Men’s Mental Health awareness for International Men’s Day on 19th November.

A variety of approaches will be used to both inform and engage staff in these events. More recently Men’s Mental Health Day has been supported by a video where our own staff have talked about their mental health experiences. We have at the same time sought to provide mental health information and signposting to support our staff, including those services offered internally through Occupational Health.

8. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 8.1 In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out because the matters contained in this report will not lead to a policy change.
- 8.2 Areas of policy changes that are identified in Project(s) are subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.

9. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The course of action recommended in this report does not raise issues which should be drawn to the attention of the Authority's Monitoring Officer.

10. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

11. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[12301233 FRA Portfolio Management \(3PT\) - Feb 23.docx](#)
[1076238 Report 1 - FRA Portfolio Management \(3PT\). docx](#)
[22209231 Report 2 - FRA Portfolio Management \(3PT\).docx](#)

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