

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
COLLABORATION AND TRANSFORMATION COMMITTEE

12 DECEMBER 2022

1. COLLABORATION WITH AMBULANCE SERVICES

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT Members note the current state of collaboration between West Midlands Fire Service and West Midlands Ambulance Service.
- 1.2 THAT Members note examples of collaboration by other FRS with Ambulance Services in England.
- 1.3 THAT Members consider the role the Authority could play in supporting or encouraging further collaboration between the services.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To inform members of current collaboration arrangements with West Midlands Ambulance Service and other FRS/Ambulance Collaboration arrangements across England.
- 2.2 To instigate discussion on actions the committee could take to drive forward further collaboration between blue light services.

3. EMERGENCY SERVICE COLLABORATION - BACKGROUND

- 3.1 All three emergency services (Ambulance, Fire and Police) have a duty to collaborate under the Policing and Crime Act 2017. This duty requires all services to “keep under consideration” whether entering into a collaboration agreement with one or more other emergency services could be in the interests of efficiency or effectiveness.

- 3.2 However, it is only a requirement to consider collaboration, not a requirement to do it, and services do not have to enter into an agreement where they are of the view that it would impact negatively on public safety or their own efficiency or effectiveness.

4. **WMFS AND WEST MIDLANDS AMBULANCE SERVICE COLLABORATION**

- 4.1 West Midlands Fire Service and West Midlands Ambulance (and indeed West Midlands Police) have long collaborated on operational matters, ensuring services can work together effectively at incidents. A recent example being [new downlink technology](#) giving both fire and ambulance access to National Police Air Service aerial footage at incidents.
- 4.2 In the case of major or complex incidents, services follow the principles outlined by the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#). The services train together regularly to prepare for major incidents, including for [major events such as the Commonwealth Games](#).
- 4.3 There has also been some limited collaboration around shared estate with West Midlands Ambulance, in particular since their move toward a “Hub-and-Spoke” model that saw them reduce the number of ambulance stations and replace them with larger hubs. This originally saw a number of ambulances and other vehicles based on WMFS stations, but these have reduced to just first responder vehicles based at Solihull and Bournbrook. This has occurred in part due to WMAS’s efforts to reduce rental costs.
- 4.4 In terms of co-responding or other more direct operational support to WMAS in delivery of its response to medical emergencies there has been little interest. WMAS do not have co-responding in place with any of the five FRS in their service area.

5. **COLLABORATION BETWEEN FRS AND AMBULANCE ELSEWHERE**

- 5.1 While collaboration between ambulance and fire is limited in the West Midlands, there are numerous examples from elsewhere in the country, with some arrangements in place for a number of years.

5.2 **Shared Estates**

- 5.2.1 Co-location has been introduced by a number of emergency services, which sees ambulances (and/or police) based on Fire Stations. As most FRS have a fairly significant spread of sites, especially in rural areas, this has proven useful while reducing costs for other blue light services.
- 5.2.2 On some occasions this includes developing specific Co-located or even Tri-service facilities designed to cater for all three services (rather than making use of existing FRS estate). Examples include [Coalville in Leicestershire](#), [Hungerford](#) and [Theale in Berkshire](#) and the “[Blue Light Campus](#)” in Lincolnshire which will host an Ambulance service “hub”, rather than being a “spoke” site.

5.3 **Co-responding/First Responding**

- 5.3.1 A number of FRS operate Co-Responding or First Responder schemes whereby fire and rescue service staff respond to the highest risk medical incidents to provide support until paramedics can arrive. These take a range of different forms depending on the level of training provided to FRS staff. In the [Thames Valley and Hampshire area](#), Co-Responding FRS staff work alongside Police and Community Co-Responders to support South Central Ambulance service, having responded to over 5,400 calls. [In the South West](#), alongside driving duties introduced in the pandemic firefighters from five services have acted as co-responders alongside ambulance colleagues.
- 5.3.2 Cornwall are the first FRS to introduce [Tri-Service safety officers](#), which sees one person trained as a retained firefighter, community co-responder and in neighbourhood policing. This is intended to truly integrate not only response but community prevention/intervention activity.
- 5.3.3 [COVID Driving](#) – During the COVID Pandemic, some FRS provided support by driving ambulances to cope with additional demand. Across the country firefighter drivers responded to over 100,000 incidents.
- 5.3.4 Historical opposition to Co-Responding/First Responding by the Fire Brigades’ Union [ended in 2015](#). Arrangements must still, in the FBU’s view, be negotiated nationally through the NJC, and

would need to address concerns about issues such as policy, training and liability, but the FBU is no longer opposed to such schemes as a matter of policy.

6. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

There are no specific equalities impacts as a result of this paper or recommendations.

7. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

As mentioned above, West Midlands Fire Service is subject to a legal duty to consider collaboration with other emergency services. It is the role of the committee, as defined by its Terms of Reference to “support the Fire Authority’s role and responsibility with regards to: The strategic development and assurance of transformational collaborative working agreements (up to implementation) aligned to the ‘Duty to Collaborate’ within the Policing and Crime Act 2017.”

8. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications from information provided within this report.

9. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environmental implications from information provided within this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Policing and Crime Act 2017](#)
- [ESCWG – Duty to Collaboration Information and Support Document](#)

The contact for this report is Tom Embury, Deputy Clerk to the Authority.

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