

WEST MIDLANDSFIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
COLLABORATION AND TRANSFORMATION COMMITTEE

15 JANUARY 2024

1. LOCAL AUTHORITY COLLABORATION

Report of the Clerk of the Authority

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1. THAT Members note the details of current WMFS collaboration with Local Authorities within the West Midlands.
- 1.2. THAT Members consider the further role that Authority members could play in fostering collaboration between the Service and constituent Authorities.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1. To provide members with background information on existing collaboration between WMFS and the seven constituent Local Authorities within the West Midlands, and support discussion on the role of Fire Authority members in supporting and extending such collaboration.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. Aside from collaboration at emergency incidents, WMFS works closely with all seven of our constituent authorities in a wide range of areas, including, but not limited to:

3.2. Local Resilience Forum

All seven Local Authorities are members of the West Midlands Conurbation Local Resilience Forum alongside WMFS, as well as partners from the Police, NHS and other “Category 1” responders as defined by the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA). WMFS also chairs the Forum. The purpose of the LRF process is to ensure effective delivery of duties under the CCA that need to be developed in a multi-agency environment and individually as a

Category 1 responder. These duties include planning for foreseeable risks across the West Midlands Conurbation, enabling a more effective joint response when these risks are realised and emergency incidents occur.

3.3. **Protection of Buildings**

WMFS works closely with local authorities to ensure the protection of buildings in their local areas, especially where they are LA owned. This has included supporting the fitting of sprinklers in a number of high-rise residential properties owned by local authorities. Local Authorities also play an important role in supporting the Service to secure dangerous buildings where they present a risk to the public, such as derelict buildings or buildings that have been involved in a fire.

3.4. **Fire Safety Order – Building Regulations and Planning**

WMFS's Building Regulations and Planning team ensure that buildings are constructed and changed in accordance with all fire safety aspects of current building regulations.

Article 45 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO) says that, where it is proposed to erect, extend, alter or change the use of a building, a local authority must consult WMFS before passing plans for premises where the Order applies. The team then provide 'observations' on the plans.

Councils also consult with our Building Regulations Team regarding changes to buildings with a higher risk profile, such as properties that become licensed homes of multiple occupancy, or where the local authority has discovered properties that don't have the necessary planning or building consents.

3.5. **Fire Safety Order – Licensing**

Our Fire Safety Officers work in conjunction with Local Authorities to ensure the FSO is enforced. Under Article 42 of the FSO, local authorities must ensure that WMFS can make 'representations' before issuing a licence to any commercial business applying for a licence under the Licensing Act 2003.

Licensing officers must also notify the local Authority of any action that it takes in relation to licensed premises. The local authority enforces the Safety at Sports Ground Act 1975 and Fire Safety & Safety of Places of Sports Act 1987 in the West Midlands however, licensing officers act in an advisory capacity to the local authority for fire safety measures in these premises.

Licensing officers also play a key role on Safety Advisory Groups (SAGs) for all local authorities. SAGs provide a forum for discussing and advising on public safety at an event.

3.6. **Prevention Activity**

Our Safe and Well and other prevention activity is targeted at the most vulnerable, and we are helped to target by referrals from partners, including from local authorities. Equally, we aim to refer those we visit to appropriate support and services as required, including to the local authority.

We have a key role to play in safeguarding vulnerable people and work closely with local authorities and other partners to do this. For example, all seven local authority areas have a framework setting out a multi-agency approach to supporting people with self-neglect and/or hoarding issues, which also set out approaches to joint working. This includes referring cases of hoarding to WMFS for a Safe and Well, or to our Complex Needs Officers where a case is more complex.

We work with local authorities on specific campaigns as well, be that water, road or fire safety. A recent example would be the [“Safe Battery Disposal” campaign](#) launched with Sandwell Council designed to reduce the number of fires caused by carelessly discarded batteries and electrical items.

3.7. **Partnerships**

WMFS and Local Authorities collaborate as members of a range of partnerships at the local and regional level, including the West Midlands Road Safety Partnership, and the West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership.

4. **ROLE OF AUTHORITY MEMBERS**

- 4.1. The role of Fire Authority members is defined in the Authority's Constitution, and Article 2 section 2.2.1 sets out the various responsibilities of members, including to represent and promote the work of the Authority in its provision of fire services, and to fulfil "a community leadership and representative function, working as necessary in partnership with other local organisations in order to effectively promote the safety and well-being of the whole community of the West Midlands."
- 4.2. Section 41 Members have a more specific responsibility to answer questions on behalf of the Authority at their constituent council, and to more widely act as lead members on behalf of their Local Authority. S41 members already provide regular six-monthly reports to their authorities which outline service performance and highlight key areas of work.
- 4.3. It is clear that members have a role to play in facilitating and supporting the effective collaboration between local authorities and the fire service and are uniquely well placed to do so as representatives of both.
- 4.4. There is already a strong track record of members supporting such collaboration in areas such as the retro-fitting of sprinklers in local authority housing, tackling anti-social behaviour and securing derelict or other high-risk sites to reduce the risk of arson or accidental fires.
- 4.5. There may be further opportunities for members to support collaboration between their local authorities and WMFS, and to raise awareness within their local authority of the services or support that WMFS can offer. It may also be that, in line with their role as defined within the constitution, they could make the service aware of opportunities for further collaboration with projects or pieces of work undertaken by their local authority.

5. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

No initial Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken as this paper does not relate to service policy change.

6. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no matters within this paper that need to be brought to the attention of the Monitoring Officer.

7. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications to West Midlands Fire Service.

8. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct environmental implications to the service as a result of this paper as it is to note.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The contact for this report is Tom Embury, Political and Policy Advisor – tom.embury@wmfs.net.

Karen Gowreesunker
CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY