

# **WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

**19 FEBRUARY 2024**

## **1. STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2022-2023**

Joint report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, and the Monitoring Officer.

RECOMMENDED

THAT the Authority approves the Statement of Assurance 2022-23.

## **2. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report is submitted to seek approval for the Statement of Assurance 2022-23 which the Authority are legally obliged to produce and review on an annual basis under the Fire and Rescue National Framework.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England published in May 2018 sets out a requirement for Fire and Rescue Authorities to review and publish a 'Statement of Assurance' on an annual basis. The requirement is contained within Chapter 4 of the Framework which focuses on governance.
- 3.2 In line with this expectation, the Authority's Statement of Assurance (attached as Appendix 1) has been reviewed for the year 2022-23 and is submitted for approval.
- 3.3 The 'Guidance on Statements of Assurance for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England' issued by the Government in May 2013 remains current. The guidance stipulates the content of a Statement of Assurance.

The following three key areas must form part of any Statement of Assurance:

- Financial
- Governance
- Operational

3.4 Additionally, the guidance states that Fire and Rescue Authorities may wish to include a section on any potential improvements they have identified across their accounting, governance, or operational responsibilities to communities. These have been included in the three main areas above to assist the contextual flow of the statement; Reflecting the work of the Service in delivering continuous improvement and transformation, to deliver our vision of 'Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger, and Healthier.

3.5 With regard to our arrangements the following are all part of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority's (WMFRA) assurance process.

#### 3.5.1 **Financial**

The Authority publishes its Statement of Accounts, pay policy, transparency data, internal and external audit information. Each year the auditors discharge pre-agreed audit plans and are invited to the Fire Authority and Audit and Risk Committee to give their findings. Additionally, the outcomes are published via Fire Authority meetings, the internet and contained within the Annual Report.

#### 3.5.2 **Governance**

Each year the Authority produces its Annual Governance Statement in support of its accounts. This statement expresses the measures undertaken to ensure propriety. In addition, the Fire Authority maintains a level of scrutiny of the Service through its governance framework, the reports of which are all publicly available.

### 3.5.3 **Operational**

The Fire Authority has committed to consult on its Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) every three years, or where there is a material change to it. This process of consultation is robust and is in line with the Fire Authority's own consultation strategy, which is based on government guidance, and ensures statutory requirements are met regarding the requirement to publicly consult on the CRMP.

- 3.6 It is reassuring to note the majority of the information required as part of the Statement of Assurance is established within the organisation and the vast majority of the documents are already within the public domain. We do acknowledge the benefits of bringing our key financial, governance and operational assurances together within a single document in terms of providing transparency and assurance to our staff, communities, partners and the Government. The Statement of Assurance also ensures compliance with our specific data transparency requirements, for example the Local Government Transparency Code.
- 3.7 The Authority is required to review this document annually to reflect the previous year's activity.

## 4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out. The matters contained in this report do not relate to a policy change.

## 5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The preparation of the Statement of Assurance document is a legal requirement as part of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

There are no matters arising out of this report that are required to be brought to the attention of the Monitoring Officer.

## 6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, \(Home Office, 2018\).](#)

[Guidance on statements of assurance for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England, \(DCLG, May 2013\).](#)

[Report by the Home Secretary on Fire and Rescue Authorities' compliance with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England \(Home Office, July 2023\).](#)

[Three Year Rolling Strategy 2022-2025 and Annual Plan \(WMFS, 2022\).](#)

The contact name for this report is Area Manager Marc Hudson, Head of Portfolio - telephone number 07973 810139.

JO BOWCOCK  
DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

KAREN GOWREESUNKER  
CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY

SATINDER SAHOTA  
MONITORING OFFICER

# Statement of Assurance 2022/23

## Introduction

Fire and Rescue Authorities must provide annual assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show how they have had due regard to the expectations set out in their Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

The West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA, also titled the Authority) is required to publish an annual Statement of Assurance as part of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. The Statement of Assurance for West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) is published annually, to provide an easy and accessible way for communities, government, local authorities, and partners to assess the Authority's performance and governance arrangements.

National guidance on the content of Statements of Assurance published in May 2013 suggests that where Authorities have already set out relevant information that is clear, accessible and user friendly within existing documents, they may wish to include extracts or links to these documents within their Statement of Assurance. This Statement includes extracts or links to key documents where relevant. This document sets out the approach taken to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place in terms of governance and operational delivery. It is intended to provide transparent information about its financial, governance and operational affairs.

## Foreword

Welcome to the annual Statement of Assurance from Councillor Greg Brackenridge, Chair of WMFRA, and Jo Bowcock, Deputy Chief Fire Officer of WMFS.

This Statement of Assurance provides the reassurance that in 2022/23 your Fire and Rescue Service contributed to our vision of 'Making the West Midlands, Safer, Stronger and Healthier'.

Having been incredibly proud of how everyone at WMFS responded to meet the challenges of Covid 19, 2022/23 was a year of transition to living with Covid 19, one which saw us determined to build on the valuable learning from the last two years, transforming many of the ways we work and operate.

Technology, delivered via our Digital and Data Strategy, has meant that we could carry out 'virtual' Safe and Well visits to people's homes or safety audits of tall buildings.

We have formed new partnerships and strengthened existing ones. These valuable collaborations with councils, our blue light colleagues and other organisations are the bedrock of the support we offer to the more vulnerable members of our communities.

In 2022/23 we have continued to take great strides in developing our Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), exploring how we can deliver our services in the best possible way and maximise the effectiveness of how we use our staff and

resources, increasing our capacity and capability to respond to existing and emerging risks.

Developments have enabled a range of positive outcomes including:

- Our Risk-Based Crewing (RBC) approach to how we respond to incidents means that our crews have been able to carry out more prevention and protection activities. This approach and mix of vehicle types means that we can use our people and resources more flexibly. During the extreme heat of Summer 2022, it enabled us to deal effectively with a large number of fires and other incidents over a short period of time much more efficiently.
- Our revised approach to Automatic Fire Alarms, reducing the number of occasions a full-size fire engine is sent to what turns out to be a false alarm, with smaller vehicles sent instead, ensures other resources are available to respond to actual emergencies,
- The opening of our third Technical Rescue Station, in Sutton Coldfield, providing our communities with an enhanced capability and capacity to deal with identified emerging risks in an agile and flexible manner, as well as further increasing levels of assurance and resilience in the delivery of WMFS specialist response capability and National Resilience requirements.

The Round Two inspection saw HMICFRS undertake their third assessment of WMFS and it is with great pride that we can report that our performance was judged as outstanding for how effective the Service is at keeping people safe and secure, maintaining our grade of outstanding for response to fire and other emergencies and being one of only two FRS to be graded as outstanding in understanding fires and other risks. We were graded as outstanding for our overall effectiveness, and graded as good for how efficient we are at keeping people safe and secure, and for how well we look after our people.

It is clear from news reporting and independent reviews that the fire and rescue sector as a whole continues to face problems with culture and behaviours. There are still people working in our sector who do not represent the values of the fire and rescue service, and some staff continue to suffer bullying, harassment, and discrimination. This is completely unacceptable. Where we find evidence of such behaviour we will act swiftly and decisively to root it out. We are fully committed to being an inclusive, rewarding, and safe place for anyone to work and to be their true selves.

This is one of the reasons we are so proud and honoured that WMFS was ranked number one in The Inclusive Top 50 UK Employers List 2022/23. It is an achievement that reflects the ongoing and outstanding work achieved throughout the Service, by all of our teams and staff stakeholder groups who remain so invested in making it happen. This has all been supported through the adoption of the LGA/NFCC Core Code of Ethics by the Service, which are the foundations for Our Values which encompass the things that are important to us as a Service: Community at Our Heart, Excellence, Trust, Leadership, Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion, Equality. This has been supported through the

development of our Behavioural Framework which follows national best practice founded on the NFCC Leadership Framework and Core Learning Pathways, and the launch of the Service's Inclusion Action Plan to support continued improvement of the Service.

In the summer of 2022, we were a key partner in the delivery of the Commonwealth Games which were a huge success for Birmingham and the wider West Midlands. Our work led us to being awarded 'Emergency Service Collaboration of the Year' at the Excellence in Fire Awards.

We were honoured to host the United Kingdom Rescue Organisation (UKRO) 'Festival of Rescue' where hundreds of firefighters from across the UK and beyond competed to be crowned 'best of the best' in a range of rescue skills. This event was a great opportunity for fire and rescue services to strengthen their working ties and learn from one another.

We are proud of the services we provide to our communities, our businesses, the successes we achieve with our partners, and the support we provide to the wider region, the UK and beyond. However, challenges remain, with impacts felt from global events to those closer to home. The cost-of-living crisis and historic levels of inflation remain a challenge both for our communities, and for us as a Service, with continuing budgetary pressures felt across all public services. We continue to make the case for an improved financial settlement for fire and rescue services and West Midlands Fire Service in particular, as we continue to operate with a budget far below the real-terms level of 10 or 15 years ago. The threat of further future austerity will leave the service with no further room for "efficiency" and "innovation" – you can't make the same savings more than once.

## Finance

The WMFRA places significant importance on ensuring that its financial management arrangements are in line with the expectations of a public body. As a public service the Authority are responsible for ensuring that public money is properly accounted for and spent in a way that provides value for money.

## Statement of Accounts

The Authority's 2022/2023 Statement of Accounts is prepared in accordance with CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom, under International Financial Reporting Standards. The Authority's accounts for the financial year 2022/23 consist of the following:

- The Comprehensive Income and Expenditure statement, the Authority's main revenue account, covering income and expenditure on all services
- The Movement in Reserves Statement, which shows movement in the year on different reserves held by the Authority
- The Balance Sheet, which sets out the financial position of the Authority at the 31 March 2023

- The Cash Flow Statement, showing movements in cash and cash equivalents during the year and the cash position at the end of the year
- The Pension Fund Account, which summarises the movements relating to the firefighters' pension schemes

The majority of the net cost of Fire Service expenditure relates to the cost of services, £130.495m. The total Provision of Services in 2022/2023 shows a deficit of £70.451. Within this deficit is total expenditure of the Authority which for 2022/2023 was £194.829m.

The total income of the Authority in 2022/2023 was £124.378m.

In respect to the McCloud / Sargeant Ruling and Immediate Detriment, the Service has continued to monitor and engage with developments throughout including impacts upon finance forecasts and governance arrangements. The Service is operating in accordance with the 'McCloud' Remedy Period, and will be issuing Remediable Service Statements, where applicable, in August 2024. Where this is not possible, the Service ensures that information will be provided in line with the March 2025 deadline. Immediate detriment has been applied to all affected pre-existing retired members of the Scheme.

## Governance

The Authority is required to produce an "Annual Governance Statement" with its audited "Annual Statement of Accounts". The Governance Statement is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Authority's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

It explains how our service manages its governance and internal control arrangements and measures the effectiveness of those arrangements.

## Governance Assurance

WMFRA is a Joint Authority established under the Local Government Act 1985, amended via "The Fire and Rescue Authority (Membership) Order 2017", which saw the membership of the Authority reduced to 15 Members and its committee structure streamlined, achieving further efficiencies in the provision of effective governance. It is a supervisory body that ensures that WMFS perform efficiently and in the best interests of the public and the community it serves.

WMFRA have statutory responsibilities laid down in legislation including (but not limited to) the:

- Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
- Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007



- Localism Act 2011
- Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018
- The Policing and Crime Act 2017
- The Health and Safety Work Act 1974
- Fire Safety Act 2021

WMFRA is led by its Chair, Councillor Greg Brackenridge, and it comprises fifteen elected Members who represent the seven local authorities that make up the West Midlands in proportion to their size, the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner and two co-opted Members (one representing health and one representing business). The Representative Bodies, namely the Fire Brigades Union, Fire Officer Association, and UNISON, are invited to attend the WMFRA with Special Observer status.

The seven local authorities that make up the West Midlands are Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall, and Wolverhampton.

WMFRA have a Constitution that outlines how it carries out its affairs. It explains how decisions are made and brings together in one document the detailed rules and procedures that govern the behaviour of those who work for or represent the Authority.

The Authority Members have developed and adopted a local Code of Corporate Governance document which incorporates how the Authority meets the seven principles of good governance. The Fire Authority ensures that its governance structures comply with the seven core principles and sub-principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE – ‘Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016’.

These principles are adhered to via the processes outlined in the Constitution.

To enable the authority to carry out its duties effectively, in addition to the Fire Authority meetings there are several committees and regular forums that include:

- Appointments, Standards and Appeals Committee
- Audit and Risk Committee
- Collaboration and Transformation Committee
- Joint Consultative Panel
- Pension Board
- Policy Planning Forum (renamed Members Engagement Forum June 2023 onwards)
- Scrutiny Committee

You can find out more about the Fire Authority and its Members on the website, [www.wmfs.net](http://www.wmfs.net). In addition, there is a [Committee Management Information System](#) (CMIS) which provides details of all Authority and Committee meetings, reports, minutes, and records of decisions.

## External Audit

The accounts are audited by independent external auditors (Grant Thornton UK LLP) who in addition to auditing the accounts, also provide assurance that the Authority has the correct arrangements in place for securing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in its use of resources. The full external audit work programme and the risk-based approach are explained in Grant Thornton's Audit Plan. Their findings and their opinion on the Authority's accounts and the value for money is included within the Audit Findings Report.

*Note: At the time of publication external audit remains work in progress with the findings of Grant Thornton to be reported in due course. This section of the Statement of Assurance will be updated to reflect the outcomes.*

## Internal Audit

Our Internal Audits are carried out by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, the outcomes of which are reported to the WMFRA Audit and Risk Committee. The Annual Internal Audit Plan is agreed by the Committee and progress reported on a quarterly basis. The 2021/22 Annual Internal Audit Plan included the following ten areas of review: Data Protection, Environmental Protection Targets, Fixed Asset Accounting, Accounts Payable, Budgetary Control, Accounts Receivable, and Risk Management were rated with a 'substantial' level of assurance. Fire Stations – Management of Fuel, Workforce Planning, and Governance were rated with a 'reasonable' level of assurance. Payroll remained in progress by year-end.

The 2022/23 Internal Annual Audit Plan included the following 10 areas of review:

Eight areas rated with Substantial Assurance:

- Freedom of Information
- Fixed Asset Accounting
- Accounts Payable
- Budgetary Control
- Accounts Receivable
- Governance
- Risk Management
- Payroll

Two areas remained in progress at year end:

- Data Protection
- Partnerships

Each audit assesses:

- The level of risk to the Authority assigned to each auditable area (high, medium, or low)
- The number and type of recommendations accepted by management
- The level of assurance given to each system under review - Substantial Assurance, Reasonable Assurance (positive opinions), Limited Assurance, No Assurance (negative opinions)

Other sources of assurance on which the Authority may rely include:

- The work of the External Auditors (currently Grant Thornton)
- The result of any quality accreditation
- The outcome of visits by HM Revenue & Customs
- Other pieces of consultancy or third-party work designed to alert the Authority to areas of improvement
- Other external review agencies

## Data Transparency & Accountability

In preparing this Statement of Assurance, the Authority has considered the principles of transparency, promoting openness and accountability through reporting on local decision making, public spending and democratic processes.

All relevant information is published on the West Midlands Fire Service website in line with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, including information on how the Authority has spent its public money, demonstrating the Authority's commitment to transparency and accountability. This has been developed further through our work to ensure information meets web accessibility requirements.

## Operational

### Community Risk Management Plan

WMFS implements its Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) in conjunction with its medium-term financial plan and Annual Plan, which together comprise our three-year rolling strategy for implementing our Service Delivery Model.

The Service ensures that our CRMP covers 'at least a three-year time span and [can] be reviewed and revised as often as it is necessary', as required by the Fire

and Rescue Service National Framework. The Service is also required to ensure that the CRMP 'reflect(s) effective consultation throughout its development and at all review stages with the community, its workforce and representative bodies and partners' and is 'easily accessible and publicly available'. These requirements are achieved by reviewing and updating the CRMP as a risk analysis on an ongoing basis, and via undertaking a three yearly refresh including public consultation (with the next public consultation exercise being carried out in Summer 2023 to support the development of the Services three-year planning cycle).

In recognition of both the changing CRMP, role of a fire and rescue service, and government expectations, WMFRA approved the development of CRMP objectives in February 2021, and 2022/23 saw these objectives progressed and delivered through specific CRMP projects, with a focus continuing to be transforming the services we deliver to our communities in a sustainable way and importantly, continuing to mitigate and reduce risk to vulnerability of fire and other emergency incidents.

The CRMP projects:

- Risk Based Crewing / Blended Fleet

Risk Based Crewing provides an alternative approach to managing risk and finance through our fleet, to ensure we are delivering value for money, whilst providing the best services to meet the diverse needs of our communities. It focuses on lower risk incidents such as secondary fires or special service calls. The aim is to empower fire control and operational officers to make risk-based decisions regarding the right level of resources to mobilise based on knowledge, experience, and professional judgement. This approach builds on our already successful dynamic mobilising concept.

Following a successful trial period, risk-based crewing was rolled out to 11 fire stations from April 2022 as part of business-as-usual operations. Evaluation of the project has identified a 60% increase in Brigade Response Vehicle (a smaller fire appliance crewed by two or three firefighters) availability, and 84% of all secondary incidents have been attended by a Brigade Response Vehicle enabling a more proportionate response to incidents aligned to risk and protecting the availability of the larger traditional fire appliances to respond to more serious emergency incidents.

During the extreme heat experienced in summer 2022, risk-based crewing enabled us to flexibly use our resources and effectively manage the significant increase in demand and spate conditions.

The blended fleet component of the project aims to continuously explore the opportunities in transforming our use of resources and how these can be further enhanced through adapting and changing our fleet and how it is used.

The initial phase of this CRMP objective has sought to identify potential changes to the resourcing and use of the Service's current fleet, to support implementation of how we respond to Automatic Fire Alarms, develop the risk

based crewing approach, and to review attendance to road traffic collisions (RTC). Changes in relation to non-persons reported RTCs has enabled the number of incidents attended by the smaller fire appliances to increase significantly, further supporting increase in proportionate response.

The next steps of this project will see us exploring further opportunities to develop risk-based crewing and the blended fleet approach, (see section on Statement of Assurance 23/24 for further information), and although not the key driver for progressing this work, it is envisaged that this approach can generate savings and can contribute towards in-year efficiency requirements.

- **Dynamic Mobilising**

Dynamic mobilising research has continued to be undertaken to better to understand how, by reviewing our approaches to response interventions (where this is appropriate), we can ensure the most appropriate availability of resources for Category 1 incidents where there is a threat of serious harm to life and / or property.

The research undertaken to support evidence-based decision making has enabled us to better understand how our initial level of response can be more effectively aligned to the actual / known risk of an incident at the point of call. The project has worked with a range of data sets, modelling, research, and academic institutions and sector subject matter experts to assure the approach and findings. This has been further supported through correlation analysis, fire safety modelling, Fire Control research, and live burn scenarios.

The focus going forward will be to examine our findings and to use them to improve how we work, including through our risk based crewing and blended fleet approach, aspiring to move from pre-determined levels of response, to embedding the principles of people-based mobilising decisions across all of our incident types.

- **Automated Fire Alarms**

The Automated Fire Alarms (AFA) project aims to review our dynamic mobilising approach to AFAs to ensure we only send a response when required. This has resulted in:

- An amended approach to our response to AFA incidents at student accommodation. We will now not attend an AFA at these premises unless there is a reason to attend.
- Implementation of a more proportionate response to AFAs at hospitals, where possible, a large fire appliance will not attend unless there are additional reasons to.

A 25% reduction in in the use of larger fire appliances at AFAs has been observed since the introduction of these changes to how we respond.

The focus going forward will be to apply dynamic mobilising principles to all AFAs 24/7, which will include revising our approach to responding to residential care homes.

- Reducing Health Inequalities

Reducing health inequalities aims to:

- enhance the 'Up Stream' approach to firefighting through the development of a co-ordinated suite of activities that reduce health inequalities across the life course of a vulnerable person
- reduce the risk and vulnerability to fire and other emergencies and create more resilient communities.

This work continues to focus on the areas of People (more people centred and evidence based approach to prevention activities), Digital and Data (digital delivery of 'virtual' Safe and Wells), Partnerships and Collaboration (increasing percentage of Safe and Wells referred by our partners), to enable a whole systems approach to the development of interventions to enable the objective to be met, with a continuing emphasis on delivering a co-ordinated suite of activities that aim to reduce health inequalities across the life course of a vulnerable person and to enhance our 'up stream' approach to firefighting.

- Emerging Risks

The Service recognises the growing future impact of external and environmental changes and events (such as flooding, extreme heat and complex infrastructure projects) which will impact on how we deliver our services as well as the skills required of our people to achieve this, ensuring continued preparedness,

Our third Technical Rescue Fire Station opened in May 2022, located at Sutton Coldfield. The additional recruitment resulted in increasing diversity within the Technical Rescue Unit, with a 100% increase in those from BAME backgrounds, and a 200% increase in females being recruited, which will continue to promote diversity.

The Service has continued to develop its safeguarding contribution to the Prevent Strategy working closely with West Midlands Police Counter Terrorism Unit, developing training sessions for all WMFS staff to recognise and refer concerns related to extremism under the remit of safeguarding. The Service attends the local Prevent Delivery Group and Prevent Regional meetings alongside West Midlands Police, working with local authorities around the Prevent theme.

We will continue to horizon scan to identify new and emerging risks that may have an impact on the risk landscape of our communities and the services we provide. Emerging risks is a continuous process, with new developments constantly being identified and monitored, with appropriate actions put in place to manage their impacts on how we deliver our services. Recent examples include the ever-increasing presence of lithium-ion batteries, and modern construction methods.

## Mutual Aid Arrangements

WMFRA has mutual aid arrangements in place with all the surrounding Fire and Rescue Services (FRS). These arrangements include the provision of support in

the event of large-scale incidents or in instances where resources of an FRS may be greatly reduced. WMFRA is a partner in the West Midlands Conurbation Local Resilience Forum (LRF), the statutory multi-agency partnership which ensures all category one and two responders including emergency services, fulfil their roles and responsibilities as set out in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The forum enables planning to be in place in preparation for localised incidents and emergencies which may impact upon the communities within the West Midlands.

In parallel, the Police and Crime Act 2017 places a duty on Fire, Police and Ambulance services to collaborate to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of emergency services. WMFS work with partners to optimise multi-agency response and resilience through enhanced working relationships, in line with the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP). The Service continues to work closely with West Midlands Police and other partners in fulfilling its responsibilities under the Prevent Strategy.

The Service supports the UK-wide emergency approach as part of National Resilience and the Service has enhanced capabilities to support responses to major emergencies such as terrorist attacks, industrial and domestic accidents, and natural disasters, providing support UK wide and beyond. The Service is a partner in the Multi-Agency Specialist Assessment Team (MASAT) which provides initial assessment of potential Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear or Explosive (CBRNE) incidents. Our Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) and International Search and Rescue (ISAR) Teams provide enhanced capabilities for a wide variety of incidents including rescues from collapsed buildings, floods, height, and confined spaces. Following detailed risk analysis, understanding that West Midlands risk profile is changing and due to consultation work, we have continued to enhance our capabilities further with the provision of the third Technical Rescue Unit at Sutton Coldfield (see CRMP section).

Members of WMFS have been deployed to countries in response to earthquakes, hurricanes, floods and wildfires. 2022/2023 saw members of WMFS be deployed as part of the United Kingdom Search and Rescue (UK ISAR) team response to the devastating storms that swept through Malawi on Southern Africa, and deployed to Türkiye as part of the UK's response to the devastating earthquakes that struck the south of the country and Syria.

During the year, UKISAR and WMFS personnel were also among those to join convoys taking much-needed firefighting vehicles and equipment to war-torn Ukraine.

## Health Safety & Wellbeing

The Service is committed to complying with its duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and associated legislation for health, safety, and wellbeing. In line with delivering a “safer, stronger and healthier West Midlands”, it is important to maintain focus on ensuring that the Service continues to develop a positive approach to employee health, safety, and wellbeing and to protect

others from harm from its activities. To this end, the aim is for an assertive, effective, and safe approach when responding to emergencies.

The Plan Do Check Act (PDCA) cycle is used by West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) for continual improvement. The PDCA cycle incorporates: Determining and assessing health and safety risks and opportunities and establishing objectives and processes necessary for meeting the services legal requirements. Monitoring and measuring the activities and processes in relation to objectives and reporting the results, taking actions to continually improve performance. During 2022/23 WMFS have:

- **Plan:** undertaken a high-level review of the Health and Safety Framework and established a mechanism for recording and delivering health and safety objectives. The resource within the team was reviewed to ensure the size of the team and level of competence was appropriate.
- **Do:** The review of the Policy has been communicated both through the local HSW committees and the strategic HSW committee. The recording of objectives has been formalised in the new audit process. The health and safety governance structure was reviewed resulting in new Terms of Reference for local and strategic committees, this also included reporting lines and responsibilities.
- **Check:** A new health and safety audit process has been developed and implemented throughout 2022/23. Each station has been audited with a specific action plan following each audit.
- **Act:** New health and safety performance indicators have been developed and delivered through a new reporting format, reports are specific to an area as well as a higher level and delivered quarterly.

## Wellbeing

The Service has wellbeing of its people as a strategic priority, and it has launched a digital platform dedicated to collating all the employee benefits in one place making it easier for people to find. This includes shopping discounts to help people with the cost-of-living crisis and a GP helpline to help people stay in work.

We reviewed our mental health provisions and increased these by introducing a rapid CBT telephone service in addition to our Employee Assistance Programme, and this improved access and flexibility to mental health services.

We improved our maternity package and trained menopause champions to help women through this period of life.

We introduced a confidential reporting line for our people to raise any workplace concerns that they have. Our wellbeing and equality teams now work closer together and support employee networking groups.



## External Operational Assurance

Our Plan forms part of the WMFS rolling three-year strategy. The operational year of 2022/2023 and the continuing effects of the pandemic has continued to be one of the most challenging and transformational periods WMFS has ever faced. While our outstanding emergency response has continued as normal as we moved to living with Covid, all other areas of the Service have continued to swiftly adapt to and embed new ways of working.

- HMICFRS: WMFS graded 'Outstanding' in Effectiveness, Response, and Understanding Risk

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) commenced their second full inspection of the Service in March 2022, publishing their findings in January 2023 (the full report is [available here](#)). We were graded as 'Outstanding' in our response to fire and other emergencies, maintaining our grade from our first inspection in 2019. We were graded as 'Outstanding' in our overall 'Effectiveness' and we were one of only two fire and rescue services in the country to be graded as 'Outstanding' in understanding fires and other risks. Additionally, the inspection saw the assessments to both 'Promoting the right values and culture', and 'Managing performance and developing leaders' move from 'Requires Improvement' to 'Good'.

Overall, we were rated 'Good' as a minimum across all areas assessed during the inspection. To maintain and build upon the findings of the previous inspection reflects the continuous improvement and innovation that is implemented across all of our work.

- HMICFRS: Report on Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services published a spotlight report focusing on the values and culture in the fire and rescue service, the findings of which were difficult to read with reports of widespread bullying, harassment, discrimination, misogyny, racism, and homophobia across the national fire and rescue sector.

The report makes a series of recommendations intended to assist fire and rescue services to improve values, culture, fairness, and diversity. We accepted all of the recommendations made in full. We had been graded as 'Good' by the HMICFRS 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

This reflects the incredibly high standards that we have set ourselves and provides the foundation from which we can continue to meet and exceed our standards, and those of the HMICFRS. Some concerns raised in the report were already being addressed at the point of publication, where work had already begun, such as how we had pro-actively adopted the National Code of Ethics and carried out a review of 'Our Values', the foundations for a workplace free from bullying, harassment, and inappropriate behaviour. Other areas where

planning had already begun required some adjustments to ensure the requirements were met, and some areas meant additional work would be required to be done. All of which has been incorporated into the Services Inclusion Action Plan, building upon our previous Joint Cultural Implementation Plan, as we continue to develop and deliver upon the recommendations, as we strive to make WMFS a place where people can work in a safe and dignified way.

## Internal Operational Assurance

The Strategic Enabling Team (SET) is led by the Chief Fire Officer. This senior management team oversees the shape and direction of the Service and that it is adhering to our legal responsibilities.

The Service operates a three-year rolling strategy called 'Our Plan'. This document sets out how the Service will fulfil its vision of 'Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger, and Healthier'. The aim is to achieve this through its priorities and outcomes set by the people of the West Midlands through consultation and with their Fire Authority. In summary, these strategic priorities include:

- The **response priorities** that focus on dealing excellently with emergency incidents
- The **prevention priorities** that focus on delivering interventions which support safer and healthier communities
- The **protection priorities** that focus on protecting life and property to make businesses stronger and healthier

These strategic priorities are delivered through strategic perspectives which provide a focus on the internal strategies with which the strategic priorities are implemented, including the goals which provide the context of how these will be achieved. These are:

- **Community Risk Reduction**  
Achieving excellent community outcomes by reducing risk and vulnerability through a proportionate response to all prevention, protection and operational activities
- **Enabling Services**  
Providing effective and efficient systems as part of a sustainable ecosystem which supports our people and services to be excellent
- **People**  
Working together to make WMFS a great place to work for our people for the benefit of our community
- **Value**  
Deliver the maximum community benefit using the investment available to us

These goals align to our 3PT framework (Portfolio, Programmes, Projects) and are integrated into the management of our projects.

The Service has adopted a Portfolio Management approach to the delivery of our strategy. The Portfolio refers to everything we do; it is the portfolio of work that

we deliver as a Service. The work of the Service is distributed across the three distinct programmes (reflecting our strategic perspectives) of Community Risk Reduction, Enabling Services, and People.

These programmes deliver a number of continuous improvement, collaboration and transformation projects that align to our strategy of Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier.

Our Portfolio Management Office is a multi-skilled team that supports change, improvement, and delivery throughout the organisation, providing the framework, systems and training that facilitates our Portfolio Management approach, including ongoing support in the delivery of our programmes and projects.

It is through our Portfolio Management Office that we ensure internal operational assurance, utilising amongst others:

- Community Risk Management Planning
- Data Analysis
- Governance and Performance
- Organisational Assurance
- Organisational Intelligence
- Policy
- Service Peer Assessment
- Systems and Processes

Organisational Assurance is the function that provides assurance of the delivery of the Service's strategy. Our approach supports the principle of being a 'self-aware' 'learning organisation', which takes an evidence-based approach in enabling the Service to meet its expectations and commitment to continuous improvement.

Organisational Intelligence is dedicated to capturing learning and feedback to enable us to continuously improve Service policies, procedures, and service delivery, as well as identifying organisational learning and linking into internal, regional, National Operational Learning and Joint Organisational Learning processes.

Policy oversees the facilitation of the development and review of organisational policy, National Operational Guidance, procedures and guidance, providing assurance for policy owners.

Service Peer Assessment is our independent internal process to providing assurance, designed to provide a year-on-year comparison, so we can see how our fire stations, sections, and departments performance changes over time and in relation to each other.

## The performance of WMFS during 2022/23

Staff skills competency, values and behaviours are at the very core of our service delivery. Regardless of role, we want all staff to understand how significant their contribution is and how it fits in to the bigger picture in terms of helping us to

achieve our response, prevention, and protection priorities. Embracing awareness of value for money and progression of a digital approach to working underpins our service improvements and cultural development.

## Response

WMFS know that its five-minute response is based on evidence and knowledge of risk and that it saves lives, homes, and businesses. In our last national inspection by [His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services](#), our response delivery amongst our communities was graded as 'Outstanding' for the second successive time. We have continued to deliver within our defined response times throughout 2022/23.

During 2022/23 our Fire Control handled 59,598 calls, in an average of 97 seconds per call, receiving just over 10,000 more calls than received in the previous year. Our firefighters attended 29,525 incidents and they arrived at the most serious in an average of just 4 minutes 48 secs. Increases in the number of calls handled and the number of incidents attended compared to the previous two years reflect the ceasing of Covid lockdowns and related restrictions, the move to living with Covid, and the extreme temperatures in July and August 2022.

People who use their smartphone to call us on 999 can also be asked to send photos or videos of what they can see. We came up with the idea of '999Eye' and developed it with Capita and it is now embedded within our call handling procedures, proving to be an invaluable tool providing officers with greater situational awareness and enhancing decision-making processes. It was used 9,436 times throughout 2022/23 to help operators in our Fire Control ensure that the most appropriate resources were sent to incidents. The application of 999eye also supports our CRMP projects and has proven instrumental in pilots including risk-based crewing.

## Prevention

Our prevention work focuses on reducing people's vulnerability to the type of emergencies to which the Service responds. WMFS also have specialist prevention and partnership teams who support its firefighters in reducing anti-social behaviour, including arson, and improving road safety.

WMFS data shows a link between health status of an individual and Fire and Rescue related risks such as fire. This is supported by strong correlations between health conditions such as mental illness, physical disability, or mobility issues, with both the increased risk of fire and severity of such incidents on the individual in relation to injuries. These are set out in the Marmot principles.

The Service continues to use a targeted person-centred approach to its prevention interventions. Our Strategy continues to use the principle of 'upstream activity', identifying and tackling the causes of the causes of preventable death and related injury, which underpins our prevention activity.

Through the Reducing Health Inequalities CRMP objective, we have continued to focus on delivering a co-ordinated suite of activities that aim to reduce health

inequalities across the life course of a vulnerable person and enhancing our upstream approach to firefighting.

The [review of Safe and Wells](#) by the WMFRA Scrutiny Committee commencing in May 2022, was completed in November 2022. The review explored Safe and Well effectiveness and impacts upon the number of emergency incidents WMFS attends, as well to identify learning and improvements for staff and other agencies involved in the delivery of prevention activities, amongst a number of areas. The learning from the review and resulting recommendations continue to be implemented and aligns with the work the Service is undertaking as part of ensuring full compliance with the Fire Standards Board, Fire Standard for Prevention.

The use of technology has not only enabled us to continue delivering 'virtual' Safe and Wells throughout the pandemic, it has also allowed us to adapt our ways of working and how we can deliver Safe and Wells, using a combined approach of face-to-face and remote Safe and Wells.

All Safe and Wells are always prioritised based on the risk identified at the point of referral to the Service to ensure that we continue to identify those most at risk and vulnerable to fire, with face-to-face Safe and Well visits offered to those rated as most vulnerable. Additionally, face-to-face visits are offered whenever a remote Safe and Well visit identifies one is required.

In 2022/23, we carried out more than 30,000 Safe & Well visits, delivered both face to face and remotely, of which over 42% originated from partner referrals.

We have handed out over 13,000 pieces of equipment such as smoke alarms, hearing impaired alarms, mailbox protectors and fire-retardant bedding.

Despite some ongoing restrictions due to COVID related measures, our firefighters and Road Casualty Reduction Team engaged digitally with 5,685 children and young people, delivering key road safety messages, representing nearly a 57% increase compared to the height of the pandemic.

## Protection

Our protection work focuses on helping businesses to thrive, making the West Midlands stronger. WMFS advises companies how best to comply with fire safety legislation, to keep its staff and customers safe. We reviewed and relaunched our Safe and Strong visits in December 2022 to assist operational personnel to deliver high quality Safe and Strong engagement in the community, and to identify and reduce risk in businesses in line with our CRMP, through the implementation of a more streamlined approach as part of a digitally enhanced process. This was further supported by the revamp of our website providing information and useful links to strengthen and support businesses including the NFCC Business Fire Safety Awareness Tool. In 2022/23 we carried out 7,952 Safe and Strong visits providing advice to businesses regarding fire prevention and protecting staff, buildings and contents.

In 2022/23 we recorded 364 accidental fires in non-domestic properties, a 5% decrease than experienced in 2021/22. We attended 6,752 false alarms caused by fire alarm systems.

We have three 'Business Support' vehicles and a team dedicated to bringing down the number of 'unwanted fire signals' from automatic fire alarms and reduce the disruption they cause. This is complimented by our staff in Fire Control using a system known as 'call challenge' as part of our dynamic mobilising approach to check whether we need to respond, or it is a false alarm. This has led to an amended approach to our response to AFA incidents at student accommodation and implementation of a more appropriate response to AFAs at hospitals.

We have made the changes necessary to implement the recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and we are confident that we have met every relevant recommendation from the Phase 1 Report. We have since focussed on embedding and seeking continuous improvement in those areas, including:

- Comprehensive rewrite of our Tall Buildings Policy and procedures including Fire Survival Guidance, Evacuation, and Stairwell Protection, and ensuring all relevant training is updated throughout.
- Fitting of Building Information Plates to all residential tall buildings in the West Midlands.
- Introduction of comprehensive Site-Specific Risk Information guidance and processes.
- Issuing of Fire Escape Hoods for use in evacuations.
- Introduction of smoke stopper curtains to reduce smoke travel and aid evacuation.

## How do WMFS do it?

The successful delivery of 'Our Plan' is enabled by 3PT, a project management framework that has been developed by the Service and which provides the strategic link between our CRMP and operational front line delivery model. The acronym 3PT stands for Portfolio, Programme, Projects, and Tasks, and it is how the Service conducts the management of change in the form of Projects and Programmes within the whole Service (the Portfolio).

As a forward-looking service with big aspirations and committed to excellence and continuous improvement, it is essential that we continue to improve how we plan for the future. As the environment we operate in can be volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) having a robust framework can minimise many risks as we navigate our way towards a Safer, Stronger & Healthier future. 3PT provides WMFS with a strong evidence base for all the workstreams we deliver, which we can use to draw upon to provide organisational learnings that enhances our decision-making practices.

## Statement of Assurance 2023/24

The next reporting year will feature how we have continued to take great strides in developing our CRMP, especially as it is a pivotal year where we will undertake a full three-yearly refresh of the CRMP.

It is a year in which we will have reached out to you – our communities, businesses, partners, and staff, and asking you to take part in our three-yearly public consultation on our CRMP. The consultation will support a review of the Authority's three-year rolling strategy and annual priorities for 2024/25 onwards.

We will continue to build upon the recommendations of the HMICFRS Spotlight Report on Culture and Values in the fire and rescue sector, delivering upon our Inclusion Action Plan, and supporting the work of the HMICFRS. To this end, the Service has been selected as one of the 10 sample services for the forthcoming thematic inspection of the handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services in England. This commission builds upon the findings of the Spotlight Report, and we will be welcoming HMICFRS into the Service during December 2023.

We recognise that the delivery of our Strategy is best achieved through a motivated, engaged, and thriving workforce. When our people feel that WMFS is a great place to work, then our communities are the beneficiaries. That is why our annual plan includes a focus on our People, Professionalism, and Pride:

- People – continuing to develop and improve the culture within the Service, ensuring connectivity at every level. Ensuring we are setting staff up to succeed through further development of managing vacancies, career pathways and training.
- Professionalism – increased focus on standards and review of training to include Trainee Firefighter Development Programme, staff competency, and Incident Command
- Pride – in our service, ensuring the appropriate focus is given to the effective use of our estate, appliances and equipment, and standards of appearance.

Through the work of our refreshed People priorities, we will be able to report how we have ensured a renewed and sustained focus on talent management, engagement and communication, Health, Safety & Wellbeing, and an uncompromising commitment to Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion, and Equality. We will reflect how we have built upon the NFCC Code of Ethics as the platform to improve understanding and commitment to the Service's Core Values and how we continue to fine our use of positive action activities to maximise the opportunity of becoming a truly representative organisation.