



WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Monday, 13 February 2023 at 11:00

**To be held at Fire Service HQ and digitally via
Microsoft Teams**

Distribution of Councillors	
<u>Birmingham</u>	D Barrie Z Iqbal G Atwal S Spence
<u>Coventry</u>	C Miks G Lloyd
<u>Dudley</u>	I Kettle P Miller
<u>Sandwell</u>	Z Hussain R Jalil
<u>Solihull</u>	P Hogarth MBE
<u>Walsall</u>	V Waters A Young
<u>Wolverhampton</u>	G Brackenridge J Dehar
<u>Police & Crime Commissioner</u>	S Foster
<u>Representative - Assistant PCC</u>	Wasim Ali
<u>Co-opted Members</u>	Professor S Brake Sarah Middleton ABCA
<u>Independent Member</u>	Mr M Ager
<u>Observers</u>	TBC, UNISON
	R Merker, Fire Officer's Association
	S Price-Hunt, Fire Brigades Union

Please note: Meetings of the political groups will be held at 10.00 am.

Fire Authority

You are summoned to attend the meeting of Fire Authority to be held on
Monday, 13 February 2023 at 11:00

At Fire Service Headquarters, 99 Vauxhall Road, Nechells,
Birmingham B7 4HW

and digitally via Microsoft Teams

for the purpose of transacting the following business:

Agenda – Public Session

- | | | |
|----|---|--------------|
| 1 | <u>To receive apologies for absence (if any)</u> | |
| 2 | <u>Declarations of interests</u> | |
| 3 | <u>Chair's announcements</u> | |
| 4 | <u>Chief Fire Officer Announcements</u> | |
| 5 | <u>Minutes of the previous Fire Authority held on Monday 12 December 2022</u> | 7 - 16 |
| 6 | <u>Portfolio Management (3PT)</u> | 17 - 34 |
| 7 | <u>Budget and Precept 2023-2024 and Budget Forecast 2024-2025 and 2025-2026</u> | 35 - 86 |
| 8 | <u>Three Year Rolling Strategy 2023-26 and Annual Plan</u> | 87 -
108 |
| 9 | <u>Statement of Assurance 2021-22</u> | 109 -
126 |
| 10 | <u>Business Continuity Arrangements - Verbal Update</u> | |
| 11 | <u>Review of the Constitution</u> | 127 -
138 |

12	<u>Discretions Policy 2015 Firefighters and Local Government Pension Schemes</u>	139 - 152
13	<u>Monitoring of Finances</u>	153 - 160
14	<u>Contract Awards Summary for the period to 31 January 2023</u>	161 - 164
15	<u>Minutes of Previous Public Committee Meetings</u>	165 - 190
16	<u>Exclusion of the public and press</u> Chair to move:- <i>"That the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Paragraph 1, 2 and 3 of the Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006."</i>	

Agenda (not open to public and press)

- | | |
|----|---|
| 17 | <u>Planned Procurement Exercise for 2023-2024</u> |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information); |
| 18 | <u>Exempt - Minutes of the last Fire Authority held on Monday 12 December 2022</u> |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information relating to any individual Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). |

Agenda prepared by Kirsty Tuffin

Strategic Hub, West Midlands Fire Service

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This agenda and supporting documents are also available electronically on the [West Midlands Fire Service Committee Management Information System](#)

This meeting of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority will be held at Fire Service Headquarters. However, please note that although the meeting will be open to the public, there will be limited capacity due to ongoing social distancing measures.

The meeting will also be held digitally via Microsoft Teams allowing observers to access remotely. To access the meeting, please contact a member of the Strategic Hub, West Midlands Fire Service, who will be able to provide login details (please note that Microsoft Teams is not required to join a meeting) or provide guidance if you wish to attend in person at HQ.

Clerk Name:	Karen Gowreesunker
Clerk Telephone:	0121 380 6678
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West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

12 December 2022 at 1100 hours

Conducted as a public meeting at Headquarters and digitally via
Microsoft Teams

Present: Councillor Brackenridge (Chair),

Councillor Iqbal (Vice Chair),

Councillor Atwal, Councillor Barrie, Councillor Dehar,
Councillor Hogarth, Councillor Jalil, Councillor Kettle,
Councillor Lloyd, Councillor Miks, Councillor Spence,
Councillor Waters, Councillor Young, Professor S Brake - co-
opted member.

Virtual: Councillor Hussain, Mike Ager – Independent Member,
Wasim Ali – APCC, Maurice Carter – Unison, Sarah
Middleton, co-opted member, Steven Price-Hunt – Fire
Brigade Union (FBU).

16/22 **To receive any apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Peter Miller.

17/22 **Declarations of interest**

The Chair declared a personal non-pecuniary interest due to being
a member of the Firefighters Pension Scheme(s).

18/22 **Chairs Announcements**

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting of the full Fire
Authority, that took place as a hybrid meeting.

The Chair advised the authority of the sad passing of Councillor
Ann Shackleton, a former member of West Midlands Fire and
Rescue Authority (WMFRA). Cllr Shackleton served on the Fire
Authority from 2013 to 2016 and served on both the Executive

Committee and Joint Consultative Panel. She had served as a Labour councillor in the Cradley Heath and Old Hill ward for 18 years, since being elected in 2004. A minute's silence was held in her memory.

The authority were advised that the Chair and the Chief Fire Officer had sent a letter to both Ministers, local MPs and the Treasury to raise their concerns around the services funding. It had been clear that unless fairer funding was provided then it would inevitably have an impact on the services Community Risk Management Plan. Members, that have not done so already, were encouraged to raise this with their local representatives. Following the 5% pay award being rejected, the FBU began their ballot for strike action on 5 December for a duration of one month. The Chair assured Members that the authority would monitor this very closely and act where required.

Thanks, and praise was given to crews that attended the warehouse fire in Wolverhampton, for their hard work and efforts to protect the surrounding areas. This included a canal, a train line and local businesses such as British Oxygen, who provided resources to the NHS. Following an investigation, the fire had now been declared as a deliberate act.

Finally, the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) has tendered his resignation as of the 10 January and I am sure we would like to thank him for his 29 years of service to West Midlands Fire Service and wish him and his family all the success in their future endeavours. Our Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Wayne Brown, will be acting Chief Fire Officer until a process for an appointment of substantive Chief Fire Officer is completed. Between the 15 December and 10 January there will be a hand over period. The Leader of the Opposition thanked him for his service and wished him all the best in the future.

Steven Price-Hunt echoed the Chair's gratitude to the CFO for his extensive career and wished him a happy retirement. He thanked both the CFO and Chair for contacting ministers expressing their

concerns around pay and emphasised that unless an adequate pay offer was offered, members of the FBU would strike.

19/22 **Chief Fire Officer's Announcements**

The CFO echoed the condolences raised by the Chair of the Authority for Cllr Shackleton who had been on the authority during a difficult time for the service.

The authority were advised that a terrible incident occurred over the weekend in the Solihull Borough whereby, four boys were pulled out from a frozen lake by the firefighters in attendance. All blue light services attended the incident and did their upmost best. Richard Stanton, Area Commander, would be representing the service whilst work continued. It was confirmed that three of the four boys had sadly passed away. Condolences were given to the families of those affected. Praise was given to all firefighters in attendance who were assertive, effective and as safe as they possibly could be in the situation. Welfare support would be given to all those involved. Members echoed their thanks. It was agreed that the Chair of the Authority and Leader of the Main Opposition would do a joint visit to thanks the crews personally.

The CFO advised that the Cultural Review for London had been published and had been felt across the whole sector. Although, West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) had been in a far greater position, the 25 recommendations for London would be used to ensure that the WMFS was the best place to work. WMFS had been named the UK's Most Inclusive Employer in The Inclusive Top 50 UK Employers List 2022-2023.

At the annual Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards, WMFS had won two awards: Project of the Year and Most Influential Women. Praise was given to Sam Burton for her accomplishments and work around Commonwealth games/UKRO and winning the Most Influential Women award. Thanks was given to all employees for their hard work over the last 12 months for the HMI Inspection and their commitment to helping their community.

The CFO advised that Gary Taylor would be retiring on 31 January 2023. He thanked Gary for his commitment and expressed he was a respected officer by all within the service who had benefited greatly by the work he had conducted. The Chair and Leader of the Opposition thanked him for his service.

20/22 Minutes of the Fire and Rescue Authority held on 10 October 2022

Resolved:

1. That the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 10 October 2022 be approved as a correct record.

21/22 Appointment of Representatives to Serve on other Bodies

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that Councillor Gurdial-Singh Atwal would be the Labour representative on the Local Government Association (LGA) – Fire Service Commission.
2. That it be agreed that Councillor Vera Waters would be the Conservative representative on the Local Government Association (LGA) – Fire Service Commission.

22/22 Business Continuity Arrangements – Scrutiny Review

Councillor Spence, as Chair of the Scrutiny Committee presented the Business Continuity Arrangements following a Scrutiny Review, that took place on Monday 7 November 2022. She called upon Simon Barry, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, to provide further detail on the report.

The Authority were advised that following reports to Audit and Risk Committee and Fire Authority (FRA), a Scrutiny Review on the current Business Continuity Arrangements took place and had made recommendations to FRA, as per report. All relevant parties including WMFS Officers, FBU and External providers were invited to submit written and verbal evidence. The Scrutiny Committee had been asked to review the following options:

1. Option 1a – use internal resilience contracts

2. Option 1b – use external resilience contracts
3. Option 2 – use an external provider

As per appendix 2 of the report, Scrutiny Committee asked for additional information on the number of staff who had the intention to strike and information on external providers/numbers they could provide. Simon confirmed that a data collection had occurred to try and gain an understanding of staff intention to strike, as per the Deputy Chief Fire Officers evidence to Scrutiny Committee. He reiterated that it had not been a legal obligation for staff to declare their intentions and would be inappropriate for further correspondence to be issued. He confirmed that from the data collection, the service had around 70 members of staff to provide cover, should there be a strike. He confirmed that if the option to use an external provider was agreed, the number therein the contract would be provided.

Councillor Spence advised that the Scrutiny Committee rejected the options as it was felt they were not value for money and safety concerns.

Resolved:

1. That the authority rejects Officers recommendations, made on 10 October 2022, to employ either an external contractor or contingency workers (either internal or external) in the event of industrial action, be approved.
2. That additional information on staff intention to strike and competencies of external contractors be noted.

23/22 Community Risk Management Plan 2023-2024

The CFO presented the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2023-2024 that outlined the expected financial challenges that could impact the proposals provided to the Fire Authority in February 2023.

The Authority were advised that the CRMP was evaluated against the eight principles, as per the report. The Strategic Enabling Team had begun to review the proposals. The service had been working towards a required budget saving of £5-£10m,

approximately, 5-10% of the current revenue budget. More information was required at this stage as to whether this may be £4m and further information would be provided in Februarys FRA meeting. It was anticipated the refreshed CRMP and 2023-26 rolling three-year Strategic Plan would be brought to the February 2023 FRA meeting for approval. A further update will be brought to the January Policy Planning Forum (PPF).

Resolved:

1. That the update on the ongoing CRMP process, including 2023/24 risk analysis, be noted.
2. That the analysis provided of anticipated financial challenges in 2023/24 be noted.
3. That the analysis of risk produced as part of the current CRMP process be noted.
4. That the various approaches that it may be necessary for the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) to implement under constitutional delegations to meet the predicted budget shortfall in 2023/24 be noted.

24/22 **Analysis of Progress of Quarterly Performance Against the Plan Qtr. 2 2022-2023**

The CFO presented the Analysis of Progress of Quarterly Performance Against the Plan Qtr. 2 2022-2023 report. He advised that following discussions at PPF on 28 November 2022, the outstanding attendance data had now been included, as per report.

Resolved:

1. That the status of the Service's key performance indicators in the second quarter of 2022/23 (Appendix 1), be noted.
2. That the progress made in delivering the three strategic priorities contained in 'Our Plan' 2022-2025 (Appendix 1), be noted.

25/22 **Monitoring of Finances**

Mike Griffiths presented the Monitoring of Finances report that outlined the finances of the authority for the current financial year and covered revenue expenditure/capital programme.

The authority were advised that, as per appendix A of the report, the revenue budgeted, and the actuals were compared up to the 31 October 2022. Actuals spend to October 2022, including commitments, was £62.860m compared to the projected budget of £62.684m. This had resulted in an overall adverse variance of £0.176m. The services current budget was under review to address the overspend.

It was highlighted that Appendix A did not reflect the revenue budget pressures anticipated to arise from pay awards in the current year 2022-2023. As agreed by Fire Authority on 10 October 2022, the additional costs above the 2% budget assumption would be met from reserves. Slippages in the budget, as per appendix c, were highlighted.

Praise was given to the finance team for the hard work during this difficult time.

Resolved:

1. That the Monitoring of Finances report be noted.

26/22 **Minutes of the Previous Public Committee Meetings**

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the minutes of the following committee meetings, be noted:
 - Audit and Risk Committee Monday 26 September 2022
 - Scrutiny Committee Monday 23 May 2022
 - Collaboration and Transformation Committee - Monday 18 July 2022

27/22 Exclusion of the public and press

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

28/22 Planned Procurement Exercise for 2022-2023

Mike Griffiths, Treasurer/Section 151 Officer, presented the Planned Procurement Exercise for 2022-2023 report that provided the rationale for the planned tender exercises over £250k, as per report.

Resolved:

1. That the following tender exercises for the provision of various works, goods and services to West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority during 2022/23 be approved:
 - 1.1 wide area network
 - 1.2 wi-fi network
 - 1.3 airwaves equipment

29/22 Brigade Manager Staffing Matters

A short adjournment was agreed at 11:42.

The meeting re-convened at 11:50.

Please note: during the adjournment, with the exception of the Clerk, Monitoring Officer, Treasurer, Deputy Clerk and the Democratic Services Officer, all Officers left the meeting. Councillors, Co-opted Members and the Assistant Police Crime Commissioner (APCC) remained in the meeting.

Satinder Sahota, Monitoring Officer, presented the Brigade Manager Staffing Matters report that outlined a proposed Special Severance Payment (SSP) and intention to recruit to four Brigade Manager posts.

The Leader of the Main Opposition raised concerns and did not support the recommendations within the exempt report. It was agreed that a named vote would be appropriate. Members voted as follows:

Member	Vote
<i>Labour</i>	
Cllr Brackenridge	For
Cllr Iqbal	For
Cllr Atwal	For
Cllr Dehar	For
Cllr Jalil	For
Cllr Lloyd	For
Cllr Miks	For
Cllr Spence	For
Cllr Young	For
<i>Conservative</i>	
Cllr Hogarth	Against
Cllr Barrie	Against
Cllr Kettle	Against
Cllr Waters	Against
<i>Co-Opted</i>	
Prof. Simon Brake	For

(NB – the recommendations within the exempt staffing report were agreed and approved by a majority of Fire Authority members. NB – whilst Prof Simon Brake voted in favour of the recommendations within the report, as a co-opted Member his ‘vote’ did not count toward the majority decision by Fire Authority).

Resolved:

1. That the circumstances as set out within the background section and implications sections within the report, be noted.
2. That the Special Severance Payment, as set out within the background to this report and financial implications be approved.
3. That the intention to recruit, as set out in the HR implications of the report, to Brigade Managers post of the CFO, Deputy

Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) and Assistant Chief Fire Officers (ACFO) x2, be noted.

The meeting ended at 11:58 hours.

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WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**13 FEBRUARY 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

- 2.1 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 Value release 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.
- 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 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 deliverables (aims and objectives) of the three Programmes are shown below, supported by recent Programme achievements.

5. **CFO UPDATES**

5.1 **Outcomes of the 2021/22 HMICFRS Inspection report**

5.2 ***West Midlands Fire Service graded 'Outstanding' in Effectiveness, Response and Understanding Risk.***

- 5.3 Back in 2019, WMFS were graded as outstanding in our response to fire and other emergencies. We are delighted to have again received an Outstanding rating score for our response to fire and other emergencies in our overall Effectiveness. We are also one of only two FRSs in the country to be classed as 'outstanding' in 'Understanding fires and other risks. In addition, we have seen our assessment of both 'Promoting the right values and culture' and 'Managing performance and developing leaders' move from a 'Requires improvement' to a 'Good' score. This means we have been rated at least a good rating in all areas of the inspection.
- 5.4 It is worth noting that only three other FRS in the country received an Outstanding rating for any overall measure, and WMFS is the only one to have received an Outstanding for Effectiveness. The Inspectorate commented on our excellent progress in many areas, stating that we use our resources well and provide value for money. They also mentioned that we have improved how we look after our people through our Communications, Health, Safety Well-being, and our Culture.
- 5.5 The service was commended by the CFO on the significant amount of work put into both improving how we operate across the service and for the assessment itself last year. The assessment results show we have made great progress in every aspect of our work, not only in those areas in which we have seen an increased rating, to maintain and build upon these

scores means the need to continue to improve, innovate and implement across all our work moving forward.

- 5.6 A summary of grades can be seen below, followed by a link to our full report.

Summary of Grades

Question	This Inspection	2018/19
OC Effectiveness	Outstanding	Good
Understanding fires and other risks	Outstanding	Good
Preventing fires and other risks	Good	Good
Protecting the public through fire regulation	Good	Good
Responding to fires and other emergencies	Outstanding	Outstanding
Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	Good	Good

Click to Expand

Question	This Inspection	2018/19
E Efficiency	Good	Good
Making best use of resources	Good	Good
Future affordability	Good	Good

Click to Expand

Question	This Inspection	2018/19
MP People	Good	Good
Promoting the right values and culture	Good	Requires Improvement
Getting the right people with the right skills	Good	Good
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	Good	Good
Managing performance and developing leaders	Good	Requires Improvement

Click to Expand

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

- 6.1 There has been significant work conducted by the CRR Programme over the last reporting period.

6.2 Emergency Planning

- A power outage working group has been established with Terms of Reference and work is progressing well.
- Learning from Ops London Bridge (death of a member of the Royal Family) has been collated, and a formal debrief has taken place. The learning has been shared across all agencies.
- Industrial Action (IA) planning is well underway, and coordination of various activities is being managed through the Business Continuity Planning Team (BCPT).
- The Emergency Planning team continues to work closely with Fire Control to develop action plans for COMAH (Control of Major Accident Hazards) incidents.

6.3 Operations

- Operations have attended several high-profile incidents including Babs Mill Lake and a significant building fire in Wolverhampton which was declared a major incident.
- CRMP (Community Risk Management Plan) Risk-based crewing continues to prove a success, allowing Fire Control and crews to send the correct level of response balanced against risk.
- Operations managers have worked closely with our Digital and Data (D&D) teams to develop a system that ensures a 100% accurate account of Competency Risk Assessment (CRA) completion.
- Site Specific Risk Information remains a key focus with extensive work conducted to ensure our risk information is up-to-date and regularly reviewed.
- FC has now successfully completed the Multi-agency Fire Survival Guidance testing.
- Progress is being made to the deliver a review of Fire Control (project reference is 'Fire Control Fit for the Future). Fire Control managers continue to engage with other FRS (Fire and Rescue Services) to understand retained/flexible contracts, staffing models, apprenticeships, and development pathways.

6.4 Prevention

- Prevention and Operations have worked closely on our approach to Safe and Well (SAW). This has seen a renewed focus on targeting those most at risk and vulnerability, which is already seeing positive results with an improvement on SAW point score average across the organisation.
- Our Fire Investigation dog, Kai, 10, has unfortunately recently gone blind overnight. Kai was rescued as a puppy

ten years ago by Fire Investigation Officer Mat Dixon who trained him for the Service. He has worked as an Investigation Search Dog ever since, his key role was to go into the site post-fire, to sniff out whether an accelerant had been used and arson had been committed. Currently, the cause of his condition is unknown, and Kai continues to go for regular check-ups and tests to try to ascertain the cause.

- Following continued requests for our Fire Investigation team to support other FRSs, the team has drafted a Fire Dog mutual aid protocol. Once agreed this will allow (West Midlands Fire Service) WMFS to provide support to other FRSs should there be a requirement for investigation purposes.
- We have a dedicated Cost of Living section on MESH. The page has two main sections - support for our staff and support for our communities; both sections have comprehensive overviews of support available.
- Watch Commander Brinley Mills made the finalist shortlist at Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards 2022. Brinley was nominated for the unsung hero award, recognising his continued work and dedication to prevention, namely the dangers of carbon monoxide. His work continues to make community members of the West Midlands safer, stronger, and healthier.

6.5 Protection

With effect from 23 January 2023, new regulations came into force in England affecting landlords, responsible persons, and property owners of residential buildings. The regulations vary according to the type of residential building:

- has 2 or more domestic premises with common areas
- is between 11 metres and 17.9 metres in height
- is above 18 metres in height.

Where buildings are above 18 metres (or 7 storeys), the responsible person/s must:

- share plans (building and floor) suitable to aid firefighting
- share details of any external wall systems
- inform FRS of faults in lifts and key firefighting equipment
- provide a Secure Information Box (SIB) for firefighter use

Protection has developed a portal to allow 'responsible persons' to share this information with us. When a fault is recorded, Fire Control will implement the Tall Buildings Fault Action Plan.

- Following months of development, the new safe and strong process has gone live; feedback continues to be positive.
- 14 Fire Safety personnel have recently passed out from a Protection Learning Programme Development
- As of 12th September 2022, the level of response to AFAs (Automated Fire Alarms) at hospitals was adapted to a risk-based approach to ensure a proportionate level of mobilisation. This has supported Fire Control to use our existing dynamic mobilisation and where possible protect our front-line PRL (Pump Rescue Ladder) capacity for Category 1 incident response unless there are additional known risk factors.

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

7.1 Digital Transformation

This project works to improve our service, people, and communities through investment in digital infrastructure. This makes the service more secure, more efficient, and effective.

Over recent months:

- further enhancements to our cyber security posture have prevented attacks and disruption, we continue to invest to keep our data safe and reduce our corporate risks and move to recognised security accreditation, Cyber Essentials Plus.

- As part of our natural contract end dates, we are refreshing our key connectivity for stations and HQ, this will further support our mobile devices as well as improve our business continuity posture.
- The Digital and Data restructure is progressing well, and we have collaborated with the team to find solutions to longstanding issues. This will improve efficiency and effectiveness whilst improving retention and attraction in a challenging job market.

7.2 Emergency Service Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP)

This is a government led national project that seeks to deliver the updated communications devices that will enable our Fire Service and our blue light colleagues to communicate more effectively, at a reduced cost into the future, by providing enhanced data capabilities.

Over recent months:

- There has been a significant shift in the direction leading to the National programme being paused for a period estimated to be around 2 years. This will provide the necessary time for the programme to retender for the software elements. The likely full transition to the new network is going to be in 2029.
- We have completed all required tasks to this point and await the next steps from the national programme.
- The Airwave network will be invested in to ensure it remains operational. Critical devices will be refreshed to ensure we remain in a sustainable position till the transition.

7.3 Operations Digital Mobile Devices

This project will deliver mobile devices to our frontline teams. This will give them improved technology and support them with

the time they spend in the community, as well as increase their efficiency, effectiveness, and safety.

Over recent months:

- Our incident command trial is underway in the Coventry and Solihull Operations Command area using tablets and we are working to include handheld devices. There continues to be interest by other Fire Services nationally and internationally.

7.4 Vision 4

This technology has upgraded our command-and-control system, responsible for mobilising our resources across the West Midlands and Staffordshire.

Over recent months:

- We have resolved the initial snagging issues and are planning to close this project down and undertake a lessons learned exercise.

7.5 Legacy Systems Project

This project seeks to replace our Time and Attendance, Fleet and Asset Management systems. This will digitally transform our working in these areas and deliver mobile and secure systems as well as enhanced reporting.

Over recent months:

- The support for the existing system has been extended.
- Negotiations are taking place with a supplier with a view to implementing within the next month.

7.6 Sustainability

We are proactively taking steps to meet the needs of the community to tackle the symptoms of climate change and to meet

our net zero responsibilities. This will also align us to new legislation we will need to comply with as a service.

Over recent months:

- A commitment to sign the Emergency Services Environment and Sustainability Group Charter, as the principles behind it directly aligns with our developing Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) framework which is shaping our sustainability strategy.
- As part of our ESG framework, operational adaption and resilience to climate change is our first defined theme. We understand that our role is not just in responding to the effects of climate change but also engaging and influencing our communities through our protection and prevention work.
- It is with this view that we have made strides towards aligning ourselves more with the West Midlands Combined Authority aspirations for the community to be part of making the West Midlands carbon neutral by 2041.
- We are creating a 10, 3 and 1 year plan to demonstrate how we will be contributing to this aspiration and how we will enable the behavioural changes within our community and how we can most effectively utilise our resources, ranging from our emissions, energy efficiency, and how we use more effectively use our spaces for the community to improve mental wellbeing both for our staff and our communities.
- Success will be measured through a set of bespoke performance indicators which have been created in working with academic masters' students from Birmingham University and the West Midlands Combined Authority team.

7.7 Finance and Resources

7.7.1 Funding, Budget Preparation and Monitoring

Ongoing budget monitoring continues to take place and is reported monthly. Any in-year budget pressures or opportunities

are identified by budget holders and are actively managed through adjustments and in collaboration with other budget holders supported by the Finance Team. The six-month budget revision process took place during October/November which resulted in the overall 2022/23 budget being in a balanced position.

Budget pressures have been experienced in the current year for a range of reasons which include price increases linked to supply chain difficulties. In addition, there are budget pressures relating to pay award levels, linked particularly to the 'Cost of Living' crisis, given the budgeted pay award assumption of 2%. This matter was considered as a Matter of Urgency and subsequently reported to the Authority on 10th October 2022 where it was determined the costs of any pay awards in excess of the 2% budget assumption would be funded from reserves. Work is ongoing to achieve this requirement.

7.7.2 Planned Procurement

Supply chain issues continue to present challenges across many products. The Corporate Procurement Team continue to secure supplies for the Service although there are extended delivery timescales and/or price increases for a range of goods (e.g., vehicles and digital devices)

7.7.3 Vehicle Replacement Programme (VRP)

During December/January/February five new Pump Rescue Ladders (PRLs) were commissioned at the following Fire Stations:

- West Bromwich
- Ladywood
- Erdington
- Dudley
- Ward End

In addition, a new Technical Rescue Pump (TRP) was commissioned at the new Technical Rescue Station at Sutton.

7.8 Communications

7.8.1 Fire and Rescue Service Long Service and Good Conduct Medal

Following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II a new Royal Warrant is now taking place which will represent King Charles III. We are currently awaiting the arrival of the new King's Medals. In addition, operational members of staff will now be receiving a 30 and 40-year clasp that can be adorned on this medal.

7.8.2 Reward and Recognition (R&R) Celebration Event

In December 2022, a R&R celebration event took place at the International Conference Centre to recognise members of staff who have played such an important role over the duration of the Pandemic and beyond. There was an impressive attendance of 450 people. We will be looking to hold another event, but probably on a smaller scale, later this year.

7.9 Response, Organisational Policy and Assurance

7.9.1 National Operational Guidance (N.O.G.)

National Operational Guidance is the foundation for developing operational policies, procedures, and training to support firefighters to deal with incidents effectively and safely. It is 'industry good practice' for all Fire and Rescue Services to draw on. As of April 2022, WMFS have implemented all 44 pieces of national guidance and associated training packages in relation to operational procedures.

The next phase of this project is to apply the same principles to the NOG guidance for Fire Control. In total there will be circa 20 pieces of National Fire Control guidance for FC that will require developing into product packs for the service to deliver. Alongside the implementation and adoption of National Guidance, this will likely see the N.O.G team review and create approximately 50 Fire Control product packs utilising existing Fire

control policies/procedures to ensure alignment to the national guidance.

7.10 Organisational Assurance - Fire Standards

The Fire Standards Board was created to deliver industry standards to the UKFRS which ranges across all areas of FRS functions, WMFS have been involved in the development of a number of these standards.

To date 12 standards have been released and an extensive gap analysis has been completed on 11 of these, with no areas of concerns raised around WMFS compliance. Sector consultation has commenced on two new fire standards; Communication and Engagement and Fire Control, consultation closes on the 6 February 2023. The Strategic Leadership fire standard and People Development Fire Standard have recently been published by FSB and a service gap analysis will now be completed.

7.11 Grenfell Outcomes

The Service continues to monitor the outcomes of the Grenfell Inquiry and conducting the necessary assurance work against any findings.

Linked to the Grenfell outcomes the Service has recently identified and approved a supplier for BA (Breathing Apparatus) Radio replacement, this will ensure that firefighters wearing helmets and BA can effectively communicate, including when operating in high rise buildings. It is anticipated delivery of radios will be in Q1 of 2023.

7.12 BA Procurement

We are currently in the process of tendering for the procurement of new Breathing Apparatus (BA) sets as part of our BA Set Replacement Process. Our specification will challenge the sector to ensure that we have access to the most innovative, technologically advanced BA Sets which will future proof ourselves in the years to come. We have recently undertaken

pre-tender consultation with the suppliers with the formal tendering process due to begin on 31st January 2023.

To further enhance and support our desire for inclusivity, the WMFS is challenging the BA suppliers with regards to developing the capability for the potential for facial hair to be worn with BA.

The current barrier we face as a Service to driving change in this area is centred around Health and Safety: Manufacturer and HSE guidance/regulations which provide little scope to change and focus predominantly on health and safety considerations. As such, the health and safety considerations override legislative requirements under E&D law to preserve the rights of protected characteristic groups.

Our desire for this to influence and drive sector change has now been included within the tendering specification.

7.13 Drone Capability

The early use of Drones at incidents improves the situational awareness of incident Commanders and other roles, supports effective decision making and improves the overall safety of Firefighters, partner agencies and members of the public. WMFS are committed to digital transformation. Utilising digital technology will enable our workforce to continually improve delivery of services to our communities. The WMFS has recently trialled and purchased 6 new drones to further enhance our drone capability and are continually evolving how we maximise their use.

The WMFS Response Team have been working closely with Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), West Midlands Police and West Midlands Ambulance Service drone teams to review how we can work closer together to strengthen our capabilities and resilience

7.14 Manchester Arena Enquiry

The Manchester Arena Inquiry Volume 2 authored by Chairman, The Hon Sir John Saunders, was released in November 2022. The Report is an investigation on how, and in what

circumstances, 22 people came to lose their lives in the attack at the Manchester Arena on 22 May 2017 and make 149 specific recommendations.

The publication of the report provides the opportunity for the Service to consider in a structured, planned and the evidence-based way its relative position against the report's findings and in particular the recommendations made. To enable this, the Organisational Assurance Team (OA) will provide the overall facilitation and coordination of this project. They will put in place the systems, processes, and structures and build organisational capability to enable the Service to evidence its current compliance position against the Inquiry recommendations and, where required, identify, track and report progress made on the journey towards compliance.

This work will be made up of two distinct phases:

- **Phase 1** will be to undertake a gap analysis to evidence and confirm the Service's position of compliance or the requirement to be compliant against the 149 recommendations contained in the volume 2 inquiry report.
- **Phase 2** will identify and track progress in implementing the agreed actions plans to enable for compliance, where required, against the inquiry recommendations

8. **PEOPLE PROGRAMME – HIGHLIGHTS**

8.1 Managing Vacancies

As part of the review of the Managing Vacancies policy, behavioural assessments are now in place to positively inform the overall recruitment and selection process. The approach in place has been informed through feedback from staff. The new policy provides consistency from a sector perspective and is aligned to our behavioural framework and associated toolkit.

A key change to the policy is the introduction of 'talent pools' for all levels of the Service and we will be piloting a new approach to managing vacancies for opportunities which exist at Group Manager, or Middle Manager equivalent, level.

This approach will enable the Service to understand and develop individuals who demonstrate potential for future role progression, as opposed to any individual posts. This pilot is seen as an opportunity to explore new ways of working and we will be requesting feedback from those involved, at all stages of the process. This will help us to shape and define the approach for future processes for all levels.

8.2 Health and Wellbeing

The Health and Wellbeing of staff is a key priority of the people programme which spans across 3PT, enabling the delivery of Our Plan. At the beginning of January 2023, the 'Happier and Kinder Together' campaign was launched, which aims to promote the support and services available to all staff, as well as encourage health and wellbeing to be part of our conversation.

This campaign will continue over the coming months and introduce new areas as they become available.

8.3 Business Continuity Training - Organisational Learning and People Development (OLPD)

The OLPD department has prioritised some development and refresher training to provide input in 7 key areas of operational delivery. This is to assist in the competence of operational employees who are not working on front-line appliances. The purpose of the sessions is to provide the organisation assurance when utilising employees throughout any Business Continuity arrangements.

The 7 key areas that training is being delivered are:

- Breathing Apparatus
- RTC – Extrication
- Hazardous Materials
- Resuscitation and AED
- Water
- Working at Height
- Blue Light Driving

The total number of sessions facilitated at present across the 7 key areas is 55, of which this includes 190 attendees and a further 30 sessions are scheduled.

8.4 Real Living Wage

On 22nd September 2022, the Living Wage Foundation announced that the Real Living Wage had increased to £10.90 per hour for employees outside of London.

As a Real Living Wage employer, the Authority has implemented the new rate from the date of its announcement.

This means that the Service's lowest-paid staff will see their pay rise to the equivalent of £21,029 per year for a full-time employee. Part-time staff will receive the appropriate proportion of this salary.

8.5 Most Inclusive Employer

WMFS was proud to have been awarded the UK's Most Inclusive Employer.

The accolade was announced on 1st December 2022 and the Inclusive Top 50 UK Employers List focuses on best practices across all strands of diversity including age, disability, gender, LGBTQ+, race, faith, and religion.

WMFS achieved the number one spot after being placed ninth in the 2021 index. A panel of judges considers the rankings, based on 'brave and innovative' performance within diversity, equality, and inclusion.

As a Service we continue to make significant progress towards being a representative workforce. Female firefighters now account for nearly 13% of our workforce which is double the national average for fire and rescue services in England. Firefighters from under-represented ethnicities currently account for almost 14%, which is around three times the national average.

9. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 Areas of policy changes that are identified in Project(s) are subject to an Equality Impact Assessment

10. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 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.

11. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

11. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

12. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Portfolio Management - Fire Authority Report June 2022
[10706222 FRA Portfolio Management \(3PT\).docx](#)
Portfolio Management – Fire Authority Report Oct 2022
[12009221 FRA Portfolio Management \(3PT\) - Oct 22.docx](#)

The contact name for this report is Richard Stanton, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, contact number 07973 810054

Wayne Brown
Chief Fire Officer

Item 7

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

13 FEBRUARY 2023

1. **BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2023/2024 AND BUDGET FORECAST
2024/2025 TO 2025/2026**

Joint Report of the Treasurer and Chief Fire Officer.

RECOMMENDED

THAT the following be approved:

- 1.1 The Authority's Net Revenue Budget for 2023/2024 of £119.055 million which includes a Council Tax requirement of £53.864 million, set out in Appendix A, together with the associated precept levels, set out in Appendix B, resulting in a Band D Precept increase of £4.99 (7.3%).
- 1.2 The Authority's capital programme for 2023/2024 to 2025/2026 as set out in Appendix E.
- 1.3 The Authority's Treasury Management Strategy which includes the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement set out in Appendix F and the Prudential Indicators in Appendix G.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 2.1 The Authority is requested to consider the Capital Programme for 2023/2024 to 2025/2026, the prudential indicators relating to the Authority's capital financing requirements, the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement, the Treasury Management Strategy, the Revenue Budget and to approve the consequent precept level and resultant amount for each constituent District Council.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The budget setting process is a key part of the Fire Authority's arrangements which establishes the anticipated level of available funding to deliver its key priorities and services. Work has been undertaken throughout the year to determine the Authority's key

priorities, outcomes and strategic objectives contained in the 'Three Year Rolling Strategy 2023-26 and Annual Plan'.

- 3.2 On 19 December 2022, the Secretary of State for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) announced the provisional settlement for 2023/24 at £56.867m, resulting in a funding increase of £3.277m (6.1%). In addition, it was indicated the Services Grant would continue to be distributed through the existing Settlement Funding Assessment formula in 2023/24 amounting to approximately £1.3M for this Authority (£2.3M in 2022/23). The Government also proposed a general Council Tax referendum threshold of 3% for Fire and Rescue Authorities. However, for one year only (2023/24), for all Fire and Rescue Authorities, there would be flexibility to increase Band D precepts by £5.
- 3.3 The Local Government Finance Settlement is a one year only Settlement for 2023/24, rather than the anticipated two-year Spending Review period. Multi-year settlements are a more effective way of managing resources, aligned to longer term planning and this uncertainty needs to be factored into the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 3.4 The Fire Authority's provisional budget position was presented at the District Leaders meeting on 25 January 2023. The District Leaders were supportive of the Fire Service and specifically indicated they supported Council Tax for Band D properties being increased by £4.99 in line with the referendum limit that applies to this Authority.
- 3.5 Fire Authority Members received an overview of the provisional 2023/24 Finance Settlement as part of the Policy Planning Forum on 30 January 2023.
- 3.6 It is anticipated that DLUHC will confirm the Authority's 2023/24 Finance Settlement in February 2023 (this may require some revisions to this report).
- 3.7 The Corporate Risk Register has identified a number of major risks that would seriously affect the Authority's ability to carry out its functions. The very nature of the risks have made it extremely difficult to quantify any funding impact that would arise were the risk to materialise and in the short term would result in a demand on the Authority's General Balances, which are identified in Section 6 of this report.

- 3.8 In addition, there are ongoing budget uncertainties, particularly Firefighter pension related issues, that have significant funding implications but at this stage still remain unclear in terms of ongoing cost and whether those costs will need to be found by Fire and Rescue Authorities and/or by Government funding.
- 3.9 Furthermore, there are significant budget pressures affecting the Authority arising from the 'Cost of Living' crisis, particularly pay awards and inflation levels.
- 3.10 Therefore, whilst the Government funding allocation in 2023/24 is an increase in cash terms compared to 2022/23, a high level of caution still needs to be applied to future financial years as the funding position and expenditure position remains volatile for the Fire Sector.
- 3.11 Details of the proposed 2023/24 budget are set out in Appendix A, together with revisions to the current year's budget (the 2023/24 budget is replicated for information in the management reporting format in Appendix C). It should be noted that to achieve a balanced budget in 2023/24, based on the funding allocations received and the expenditure levels estimated, in-year service efficiencies of £1.1M will be required.

Business Rates Retention

- 3.12 The Business Rates Retention Scheme was introduced in April 2013 and provides a direct link between business rates growth and the amount of money local authorities have to spend on local people and services. Local Authorities are able to keep 50% of the business rates revenue, adjusted for any growth or reduction on the revenue that is generated in their area. This is intended to provide a strong financial incentive for Authorities to promote economic growth.
- 3.13 The main impact on this Authority is that a proportion of income previously paid by the Government is received via the seven West Midlands Metropolitan Councils. Under these arrangements this Authority is entitled to a payment equivalent to 2% of the amount of Business Rates retained by the seven West Midlands Councils. This is approximately £10m.
- 3.14 In 2015, the Government indicated an intention to localise 100% of business rates to local authorities. This intent was modified to 75% as part of the provisional settlement for 2019/20. However, in November 2021, the Government's Communities Secretary announced that the

75% business rates retention approach would conflict with the Government's 'levelling up agenda' and that the Government would now look at the mechanism for redistributing funding to those Authorities most in need, effectively appearing to abandon plans to allow councils to retain 75% of their business rates.

Fair Funding Review

- 3.15 The Government considered the need for a 'Fair Funding Review' a number of years ago. The outcome of such an exercise would affect how funding is allocated and redistributed between local authorities and was originally intended to determine the relative share received by each individual Fire and Rescue Authority from the total Fire Service funding received from Central Government.
- 3.16 It is now the Government's intention to undertake a Fair Funding Review across Local Authorities but not to include Fire and Rescue Authorities. On 12th December 2022 DLUHC publishes a Local Government Policy Statement for 2023/24 and 2024/25 which indicated implementation of the Fair Funding Review was delayed until 2025/26 at the earliest. Whilst it is not intended for the Fire Sector to be directly part of the exercise, issues such as the scale of Council Tax revenue generated by individual Local Authorities could have an indirect impact on resource allocations within the Fire Sector and so this review adds another complexity and volatility to long term financial planning.

Three Year Rolling Strategy 2023-26 and Annual Plan 2023-24

- 3.17 A key element of developing the Authority's plans is to seek the opinions of those people that live, work and travel within the West Midlands. As part of this, a public consultation is undertaken every three years and/or when changes to the core services are being considered by the Authority.
- 3.18 The Authority consulted the public in 2020. This provided the opportunity for the public to influence the way the Service works. The Community Safety Strategy (the Community Risk Management Plan) is the risk analysis which identifies what the risk profile of the West Midlands community is and provides analysis of where resources are required to enable effective management of these risks in order to achieve a five-minute risk-based attendance standard for the most serious emergencies.

- 3.19 The 'Three Year Rolling Strategy 2023-26 and Annual Plan' sets the Authority's strategic direction for the next three years and defines those outcomes, priorities and strategic objectives, for the first year, which are to be provided with the available resources in 2023/24 and forecasted in future years.

Firefighters' Pension Scheme – Employers' Contributions

- 3.20 HM Treasury announced changes to the discount rate for unfunded public sector pensions on 6 September 2018. This, combined with the earlier 2016 Budget announcement, resulted in a reduction to the discount rate from 3% to 2.4%, and had the effect of increasing the employer contributions (to include ill-health costs) from an average 17.6% to 30.2% from April 2019.
- 3.21 The Government Actuary's Department estimated that the additional cost to the Fire sector would be around £125m per annum. However, HM Treasury provided additional funding in 2019/20 in order to mitigate most of this increase, with the sector paying only the additional costs announced at the Budget 2016 (a reduction in the discount rate from 3% to 2.8%). This meant that the Fire sector paid approximately £10m of the additional costs in 2019/20, with the remaining £115m being provided via a grant under the s31 Local Government Act 2003.
- 3.22 For this Authority, a Section 31 Government grant was allocated in 2019/20, with a similar arrangement being made subsequently in 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23. It was anticipated that this matter would be considered within the base funding for the Fire Sector from 2022/23 to avoid the uncertainty around funding and the one-year only funding arrangement. However, this has not happened to date although a Section 31 grant of £5.7M is anticipated for 2023/24.

Firefighters' Pension Scheme – Court of Appeal Judgement

- 3.23 On 20 December 2018, the Court of Appeal handed down the judgement in the Firefighters' transitional appeals case, finding that the transitional protections introduced with the new Pension scheme in 2015 were unlawfully discriminatory on grounds of age.
- 3.24 The decision related only to the transitional protection arrangements in the 2015 firefighters' pension scheme that applied to members of the 1992 Firefighters' Pension scheme and whether these were discriminatory. It did not address the introduction of that scheme

itself by the primary legislation of the Public Service Pensions Act 2013.

- 3.25 On 18th December 2019 the Employment Tribunal issued an interim Order which provided claimants with a right to be treated as if they had met the criteria for full protection under the scheme rules. Following the Publication of this Order, the Government made a written statement and launched a Consultation on removing the discrimination from all Public Service Pension Schemes. The consultation closed on 11th October 2020 and the Governments response was published on 4th February 2021.
- 3.26 The response proposed that scheme members with benefits in the legacy schemes, those that existed before 1st April 2015, should have the opportunity to have their benefits calculated as if their membership of those schemes had continued until 31st March 2022. From 1st April 2022 all employees were moved into the reformed pension scheme. In the case of Firefighters, this was the 2015 Firefighters' Pension scheme.
- 3.27 However, the situation regarding 'Immediate Detriment' cases i.e. those staff affected by the introduction of the new Pension scheme in 2015, is still affected by a number of legal and financial uncertainties and it is not anticipated that all of the associated legal and tax regulations will be in place until October 2023. Due to these timescales and the associated ongoing unfair treatment of individuals affected by Immediate Detriment, the Audit and Risk Committee on 6th June 2022 resolved to make payments prior to October 2023, with the illustrative costs to be funded from General Reserves. Because of the legal and financial uncertainties associated with this matter, this still represents another complexity to the Authority's pension and budgetary considerations.

4. **PRECEPT 2023/2024**

- 4.1 Under the Council Tax arrangements, the allocation of the total sum required by the Authority between constituent District Councils is based on the relevant tax base for each District.
- 4.2 All District Councils have now formally set their Council Tax base and have notified the Authority accordingly. The total relevant Council Tax base for the Authority is 737,707.31 (726,271.98 in 2022/23).
- 4.3 For 2021/22 budget setting the Government amended secondary legislation to allow Authorities to spread the estimated deficit on the

2020/21 Collection Fund over the three years 2021/22 to 2023/24, following concerns that spending on local services could be significantly curtailed and/or Authorities' financial viability put at risk in 2021/22. For this Authority, the spread of the deficit was £272k in 2021/22, £169k in 2022/23 and £169k in 2023/24.

- 4.4 The District Councils have now confirmed their Council Tax surplus/deficits for 2022/23 which has resulted in an overall surplus for this Authority of £1.222m. As a result, the total surplus to be considered for the 2023/24 budget funding arrangements is £1.053m.
- 4.5 The appropriate precept has now been calculated for each District and is set out in Appendix B, paragraph 1.4, for the Authority's approval.
- 4.6 The Council Tax at Band D for 2023/24 would be £73.02, an increase of £4.99 (7.3%) per annum.

5. **FUNDING OF EXPENDITURE 2023/2024**

The figures from external funding sources are shown in the Table below:

	£000
Core Funding	56,867
Section 31 Grant	5,961
Services Grant (2023/24)	1,310
Share of Collection Fund Surplus/(Deficit)	1,053
Council Tax	53,864
Net Revenue Budget	119,055

In addition to external funding, it is estimated that the Authority will generate income of £3.387m (£3.054m in 2022/23) (Appendix D). The 2023/24 budget does not assume the use of any general balances.

6. **GENERAL BALANCES STRATEGY**

- 6.1 Based on the current forecast of net expenditure in 2022/2023, the Authority's General Balances at 1 April 2023 would be approximately £3.9 million. At this level, the amount of General Balances would equate to approximately 3.2% of the Authority's 2023/2024 Net Revenue Budget. The actual level of General Balances at 1 April

2023 will not be determined until the completion of the Authority's 2022/23 closedown of accounts process.

- 6.2 As part of considering the Authority's 2023/24 budget, following notification of the core funding settlement, the overall funding does not require the use of General Balances to support the Net Revenue Budget requirement. This would therefore result in the Authority's available General Balances remaining at approximately £3.9 million by the end of 2023/2024 .
- 6.3 The funding settlement for 2023/24 is a one year only arrangement. There is no clarity over funding levels, nationally and/or locally, after that date which hampers meaningful financial planning over the longer term.
- 6.4 Additional potential budget pressures, e.g. anticipated increases in firefighter pension employer rates, pay award demands, high levels of inflation, uncertainty around Government funding from 2024/25 onwards and a lack of any direct capital and transformation funding being available, means that the estimated level of General Balances of approximately £3.9 million by the end of 2023/24 is considered appropriate given the issues highlighted.

7. **CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

- 7.1 At the Authority meeting on 14 February 2022, consideration and approval was given to the current three-year Capital Programme. The Programme has been monitored during the year at Authority meetings.
- 7.2 It is estimated that commitments in respect of those projects which make up the proposed capital programme are as follows:

	£m
2023/2024	9.191
2024/2025	6.255
2025/2026	4.377

The full list of projects is shown on Appendix E. It should be noted that the figures reflected against the Vehicle Replacement Programme are based on the current fleet profile and operational life cycles and it is anticipated that a review of these provisions will be required following the completion of the 'Blended Fleet' workstream within the Community Risk Management Plan objectives.

- 7.3 The Table below compares the expenditure on those projects within the capital programme which are committed against a forecast of projected resources for the period 2023/24 to 2025/2026.

	2023/24 £m	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m
Capital Receipts	2.749	-	-
Capital Grants	-	-	-
Revenue Funding	6.442	-	-
Total Capital Resources	9.191	-	-
<u>Less: Commitments</u>	9.191	6.255	4.377
Funding Surplus/(Deficit)	-	(6.255)	(4.377)

- 7.4 At the time of announcing the funding settlement for 2023/24, no specific allocations have been made by the DLUHC in relation to capital funding. The lack of any specific capital funding allocations continues to be an issue for the Fire sector which central Government have been asked to address.
- 7.5 The Authority's capital programme has predominantly been funded by earmarked reserves in recent years and this continues to be the case for 2023/24 . However, it needs to be highlighted that at this stage there is a deficit in the capital programme in 2024/25 and 2025/26, summarised in the above Table.

8. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND THE PRUDENTIAL CODE**

- 8.1 The Fire Authority recognises the importance of Treasury Management to the economy and efficiency of its finances. It also recognises that delivering quality services in this area requires expertise and skills that can best be provided by specialist professions from external organisations.
- 8.2 West Midlands Fire Service's Treasury Management functions are provided by Sandwell MBC who have in turn appointed external advisors to support them. The Fire Authority has also linked its appointment of bankers to that of Sandwell MBC in order to benefit from efficiencies in tendering, cash flow management and investment.
- 8.3 The Treasury Management Strategy for 2023/24 is set out in Appendix F.

- 8.4 Under the Local Government Act 2003, credit approvals were abolished, and a new prudential capital finance system was introduced from 1 April 2004. CIPFA has prepared a Prudential Code which underpins the system of capital finance. Local authorities are required by Regulation to have regard to the Prudential Code under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 8.5 The key objectives of the Prudential Code are to ensure that the capital investment plans of the Authority are affordable, prudent and sustainable. A further key objective is to ensure that treasury management decisions are taken in accordance with good professional practice and in a manner that supports prudence, affordability and sustainability.
- 8.6 To demonstrate that local authorities have fulfilled these objectives, the Prudential Code sets out the indicators that must be used and the factors that must be taken into account. The indicators are designed to support and record local decision making.
- 8.7 The Prudential Indicators that have been calculated for this Authority are detailed on Appendix G.

9. **PLANNING FOR THE 2024/2025 TO 2025/2026 BUDGET**

- 9.1 In preparing the draft revenue budget for 2023/2024, an expenditure forecast for 2024/2025 to 2025/2026 has also been undertaken by “rolling forward” the 2023/24 draft budget; updating for specific known budget pressures, anticipated inflation and pay awards, adding in commitments, adjusting for anticipated staff turnover levels, setting efficiency targets, etc. (Appendix H).
- 9.2 The funding settlement for 2023/24 is a one year only arrangement and in the Secretary of State for DLUHC settlement announcement there was no indication of further funding levels beyond 2023/24. In planning for the 2024/25 budget, an increase of 2% has been reflected in the overall core funding and a further 2% in 2025/26. It should be noted that this is a very provisional figure and there is the potential for the scale of increases to be greater than this base assumption (or that reductions may apply). Every 1% increase/reduction in core funding represents an impact of circa £0.570m funding for the Authority.
- 9.3 A summary of the impact of the indicated increases in core funding is shown in the table below:

Estimated position based on the financial settlement for core funding for 2023/24 and an increase of 2% in 2023/24 and 2024/25 (with a Band D Council Tax increase of £4.99 (7.3%) in 2023/24 and 3% in 2024/25 and 2025/26)

	2023/24 * £m	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m
Net Budget Requirement	119.055	120.500	123.918
Core Funding	56.867	58.004	59.164
Section 31 Grant	5.961	5.961	5.961
Services Grant	1.310	-	-
Council Tax	53.864	56.035	58.293
Council Tax Surplus/(Deficit)	1.053	500	500
Available Resources	119.055	120.500	123.918
Budget Surplus/(Deficit)	-	-	-

* To set a balanced budget of £119.055M in 2023/24 requires efficiency savings of £1.1M

10. ROBUSTNESS OF THE BUDGET PREPARATION AND ADEQUACY OF RESERVES

10.1 In accordance with the Local Government Act 2003 (S25-S27) and to comply with CIPFA guidance on local authority reserves and balances, the Treasurer is required to formally report to members on the robustness of the budget and the adequacy of reserves.

10.2 The budget presented to the Authority has been prepared using reasonable and appropriate estimation techniques for both expenditure and income. The budget process is such that all financial pressures faced by the Authority have been considered and resources allocated as appropriate to fulfil the priorities of the Authority. Where resources have not been allocated to identified pressures either; the pressure has been absorbed into the existing budget or the risk associated with not meeting the pressure has been evaluated and appropriate action taken. The robustness of the budget preparation undertaken by the Authority is therefore considered satisfactory.

10.3 The appropriate level of reserves and provisions has been assessed and determined using a variety of mechanisms, including:

- The budget setting process, the annual financial cycle and contributions from the strategic leadership of the organisation.
- Considering the budget at various stages of construction including the reasonableness of the key budget assumptions such as estimates of inflationary and corporate financial pressures, realism of income targets and the extent to which known trends and liabilities are provided for.
- Review of the movements, trends and availability of contingencies, provisions and earmarked reserves to meet anticipated and unforeseen cost pressures in the context of future pressures and issues.
- The use of professional experience and best professional judgement.
- The use of appropriate professional, technical guidance and local frameworks.
- Knowledge of the Officers involved in the process, particularly finance professionals, including their degree of experience and qualifications.
- Review of the strength of financial management and reporting arrangements including internal control and governance arrangements.

10.4 The Authority's aim is to have a prudent level of General Balances informed by an assessment of potential risks to the organisation. The level of General Balances at the end of the financial year 2021/22 was approximately £3.9m, 3.2% of the Authority's 2023/24 net budget requirement. This level of balances is considered appropriate at this stage due to the assumptions for core funding in future years, volatility of Council Tax collection rates and the absence of capital and transformation funding available to the Authority.

10.5 It was deemed that a prudent level of earmarked reserves was established during the Authority's 2021/2022 closedown exercise. A review of these reserves will be undertaken as part of the Authority's 2022/2023 closedown of accounts process.

10.6 Based on known circumstances and financial risk assessments, it is felt that adequate earmarked reserves and provisions were created to meet legal and expected liabilities, as at 31 March 2022. A list of the reserves and the intended strategy for their use in future years is provided in Appendix J.

- 10.7 Consideration will be given to the appropriate level of reserves required as at 31 March 2023 as part of the Authority's closedown of accounts process.
- 10.8 In recommending an adequate level of reserves, consideration is given to the opportunity costs of maintaining particular levels of reserves and balances and compares these to the benefits accrued from having such reserves. The opportunity cost of maintaining a specific level of reserves is the 'lost' opportunity, for example, of investing elsewhere to generate additional investment income or using the funds to invest in service improvements. In assessing this, it is important to consider that reserves can only be used once and are therefore potentially only 'one-off' sources of funding. Therefore, any use of general reserves is only ever used on one-off items of expenditure and/or to assist transformational change. The level of reserves is also determined by use of a comprehensive risk assessment to ensure they represent an appropriately robust 'safety net' which adequately protects against potential unbudgeted costs.
- 10.9 The current level of reserves is considered to be sufficient in all but the most unusual and serious combination of possible events. In this context it is considered that the current level of reserves presents an optimum balance between risk management and opportunity cost. This maintains a suitable and sustainable level of reserves, which include ensuring sound governance and financial stability in the short and longer term.
- 10.10 Best endeavours have been made to ensure that the budget and reserves are adequate using the information available at this date. The budget has been constructed with a professional policy led medium term strategic framework using appropriate assumptions, linking investment and spending to key priorities and having undertaken a comprehensive assessment of risk.
- 10.11 The forecast budget for 2024/25 and 2025/26 shows a balanced budget. As stated earlier, it may be that the scale of funding will vary. In addition, given the number of issues that could have a significant impact on the Authority's budget position over the period of the medium term financial plan i.e.; future Government funding allocations to the Fire Sector, the treatment of firefighter pension related issues, pay award/inflation pressures and the indicative deficit in year's two and three of the capital programme, the need for and scale of budget savings required over the period of the medium term financial plan needs to be kept under review.

11. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 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 and/or do not relate to a policy change.

12. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 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.

13. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 There are no environmental implications.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

DLUHC/Home Office Communications

District Leaders' Meeting 25 January 2023

Policy Planning Forum 30 January 2023

Three Year Rolling Strategy 2023-26 and Annual Plan

The contact name for this report is Karen Gowreesunker, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, 0121 380 6906.

WAYNE BROWN
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

MIKE GRIFFITHS
TREASURER

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**SUMMARY OF 2022/2023 AND 2023/2024 BUDGET**

	Original Budget 2022/23 £000s	Revised Budget 2022/23 £000s	Original Budget 2023/24 £000s
<u>Expenditure</u>			
Employees	98,340	100,730	106,733
Premises	5,969	6,858	7,588
Transport	1,535	1,924	2,191
Supplies & Services	9,800	10,550	11,356
Capital Financing	7,921	7,911	7,931
Appropriations to Reserves	100	100	100
Efficiency Savings	-	-	(1,128)
Total Expenditure	123,665	128,073	134,771
<u>Income</u>			
Government Grants	(56,520)	(56,473)	(60,547)
Non-Domestic Rates	(9,846)	(9,846)	(10,346)
Income from Services	(3,054)	(3,545)	(3,387)
Collection Fund (Surplus) / Deficit	594	594	(1,053)
Appropriations from Reserves	(5,434)	(9,398)	(5,574)
Total Income	(74,260)	(78,668)	(80,907)
COUNCIL TAX REQUIREMENT	49,405	49,405	53,864
Collection Fund Surplus / (Deficit)	(594)	(594)	1,053
Core Funding (Formula Grant)	43,744	43,744	46,521
Core Funding (NNDR)	9,846	9,846	10,346
Section 31 Grant	5,902	5,902	7,271
NET REVENUE BUDGET	108,303	108,303	119,055

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**BAND D PRECEPT INCREASE OF £4.99 (7.3%)**

- 1.1 THAT it be noted that the constituent District Councils have formally set their Council Tax bases for the year 2023/2024 in accordance with Regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 made under Section 33(5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as follows:

	Tax Base
Birmingham	263,262.00
Coventry	86,075.20
Dudley	93,834.60
Sandwell	76,764.73
Solihull	79,168.00
Walsall	72,608.66
Wolverhampton	65,994.12
	<u>737,707.31</u>

- 1.2 THAT the following amounts be now calculated by the Authority for the year 2022/2023 in accordance with Sections 40 to 48 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:

- 1.2.1 £134,771,000 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Authority estimates for the items set out in Section 42A(2)(a) to (d) of the Act.
- 1.2.2 £80,907,080 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Authority estimates for the items set out in Section 42A(3)(a) to (b) of the Act.
- 1.2.3 £53,863,920 being the amount by which the aggregate at 1.2.1 above exceeds the aggregate at 1.2.2 above calculated by the Authority in accordance with Section 42A(4) of the Act as its council tax requirement for the year.
- 1.2.4 £73.02 being the amount at 1.2.3 above divided by the total amount at 1.1 above, calculated by the Authority in accordance with Section 42B(1) of the Act as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.

1.3	<u>Valuation Bands:</u>	£	£
		(to 6 decimals)	(rounded to 2 decimals)
	A	48.676866	48.68
	B	56.789677	56.79
	C	64.902488	64.90
	D	73.015299	73.02
	E	89.240921	89.24
	F	105.466544	105.47
	G	121.692166	121.69
	H	146.030599	146.03

being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at 1.2.4 above by the number which in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Authority in accordance with Section 47(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

1.4 Resultant precepts:

	£
Birmingham City Council	19,222,154
Coventry City Council	6,284,807
Dudley MBC	6,851,361
Sandwell MBC	5,605,000
Solihull MBC	5,780,475
Walsall MBC	5,301,543
Wolverhampton City Council	<u>4,818,580</u>
Total	<u>53,863,920</u>

being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at 1.2.4 above by the appropriate tax base at 1.1 above in accordance with section 48(2) of the Act, as the amount of precept payable by each constituent District Council.

- 1.5 THAT the precept for each District Council as calculated at 1.4 above be issued in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**SUMMARY OF 2022/2023 AND 2023/2024 BUDGET****SERVICE ANALYSIS**

	Original 2022/23 £'000	Revised 2022/23 £'000	Original 2023/24 £'000
<u>Devolved Budgets</u>			
Democratic Rep & Brigade Managers	1,126	1,102	1,137
Corporate Charges	0	2	0
Portfolio & Organisational Intelligence	1,696	1,753	1,856
Operations	2,421	3,487	3,375
Fire Control & Business Continuity	1,690	1,700	1,727
Prevention	2,142	2,240	2,336
Protection	4,807	5,058	4,901
Policy & Organisational Assurance	1,473	1,738	1,627
Resourcing	5,811	6,820	6,666
Digital & Data	5,530	7,738	6,353
Communications & Engagement	767	1,039	1,032
People Support Services	616	627	626
Employee Relations	155	195	108
Organisational Development	58	62	61
Organisational Learning People Development	4,181	4,425	4,429
Health Safety & Wellbeing	2,474	2,837	2,869
<u>Corporate Budgets</u>			
Prevention	24	24	28
Protection	(31)	9	(11)
Policy & Organisational Assurance	(116)	(109)	(116)
Resourcing	20,906	14,209	27,620
Digital & Data	132	132	132
People Support Services	2,315	2,396	2,361

Employee Relations	130	110	130
Organisational Learning People Development	100	125	125
Health Safety & Wellbeing	48,457	49,556	48,711
Other Income & Expenditure	1,439	1,028	972
NET REVENUE BUDGET	108,303	108,303	119,055

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**SERVICE INCOME BUDGETS 2022/23 AND 2023/24**

	Original Budget 2022/23 £000s	Revised Budget 2022/23 £000s	Original Budget 2023/24 £000s
Fees and Charges:			
- Fire Control & Contact Centre	1,087	1,070	1,103
- NFCC	340	340	340
- Training	288	327	253
- Mutual Assistance	161	148	161
- Transport Engineering Workshops	125	125	125
- ICT	114	115	114
- External Contracts	98	103	98
- Child Care Vouchers	72	53	53
- Room Hire	42	8	21
- Other Fees & Charges	182	168	179
Sales	81	80	81
Rents - Property	150	153	155
Interest	120	540	540
Partnerships	186	156	156
Other Income	8	159	8
TOTAL SERVICE INCOME	3,054	3,545	3,387

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023/2024 TO 2025/2026

Scheme	Project Year In 2023/24	2023/24 £000s	2024/25 £000s	2025/26 £000s
Vehicle Replacement Programme	On-going	6,678	5,950	3,782
Boiler Replacement Programme	On-going	148	106	-
Rewires	On-going	167	79	235
Roof Replacement	On-going	325	70	250
Windows & Doors Replacement	On-going	677	50	110
Drill Tower & Burns Facility Upgrade	6 of 6	432	-	-
HQ Modernisation	3 of 3	44	-	-
Fire Ground Radio Replacement	1 of 1	290	-	-
MDT Replacement	1 of 1	430	-	-
TOTAL COMMITMENTS		9,191	6,255	4,377
<i>Projected Resources Available:</i>				
Prudential Borrowing		-	-	-
Capital Receipts		2,749	-	-
Capital Grants		-	-	-
Earmarked Reserves/DRF		6,442	-	-
TOTAL PROJECTED RESOURCES		9,191	-	-
FUNDING SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)		-	(6,255)	(4,377)

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2023/24

1.1 Background

The Authority is required to operate a balanced budget, which broadly means that cash raised during the year will meet cash expenditure. Part of the treasury management operation is to ensure that this cash flow is adequately planned, with cash being available when it is needed. Surplus monies are invested in low risk counterparties.

The second main function of the treasury management service is the funding of the Authority's capital plans. These capital plans provide a guide to the borrowing need of the Authority, essentially the longer term cash flow planning to ensure that the Authority can meet its capital spending obligations. This management of longer-term cash may involve arranging long or short-term loans or using longer-term cash flow surpluses. On occasion, when it is prudent and economic, any debt previously drawn may be restructured.

The contribution the treasury management function makes to the Authority is critical, as the balance of debt and investment operations ensure liquidity or the ability to meet spending commitments as they fall due, either on day-to-day revenue or for larger capital projects. The treasury operations will see a balance of the interest costs of debt and the investment income arising from cash deposits affecting the available budget. Since cash balances generally result from reserves and balances, it is paramount to ensure adequate security of the sums invested, as a loss of principal will in effect result in a loss to the General Fund Balance.

CIPFA defines treasury management as:

“The management of the local authority’s investments and cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks.”

1.2 Reporting Requirements

1.2.1 Capital Strategy

The CIPFA 2021 Prudential and Treasury Management Codes require all local authorities to prepare a capital strategy, which will provide the following:

- a high-level long-term overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services
- an overview of how the associated risk is managed
- the implications for future financial sustainability

The aim of the capital strategy is to ensure that Members of the Authority fully understand the overall long-term policy objectives and resulting capital strategy requirements, governance procedures and risk appetite.

1.2.2 Treasury Management Reporting

The Authority is required to receive and approve the following main reports each year. These reports are required to be adequately scrutinised by the Audit and Risk Committee before being recommended to the Authority.

Prudential and Treasury Indicators and Treasury Strategy – This report covers:

- the capital plans (including prudential indicators);
- a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy (how residual capital expenditure is charged to revenue over time);
- the Treasury Management Strategy (how the investments and borrowings are to be organised) including treasury indicators; and
- an investment strategy (the parameters on how investments are to be managed).

A Mid Year Treasury Management Report – This will update Members with the progress of the capital position, amending prudential indicators as necessary, and whether any policies require revision.

An Annual Treasury Report – This is a backward looking review document and provides details of a selection of actual prudential and treasury indicators and actual treasury operations compared to the estimates within the strategy.

1.3 Treasury Management Strategy for 2023/24

The strategy for 2023/24 covers two main areas:

Capital Issues

- the capital expenditure plans and the associated prudential indicators;
- the MRP policy.

Treasury Management Issues

- the current treasury position;
- treasury indicators which will limit the treasury risk and activities of the Authority;
- prospects for interest rates;
- the borrowing strategy;
- policy on borrowing in advance of need;
- debt rescheduling;
- the investment strategy;
- creditworthiness policy; and
- the policy on use of external service providers.

These elements cover the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003, DLUHC Investment Guidance, DLUHC MRP Guidance, the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management Code.

1.4 Treasury Management Consultants

The Authority's treasury management function is provided by Sandwell MBC who have appointed Link Group, Treasury solutions as its external treasury management advisors.

The Authority recognises that responsibility for treasury management decisions remains with the organisation at all times and will ensure that undue reliance is not placed upon Sandwell MBC and the external service providers. All decisions will be undertaken with regards to all available information, including, but not solely, the treasury advisers.

It also recognises that there is value in employing external providers of treasury management services in order to acquire access to specialist skills and resources. Sandwell MBC will ensure that the terms of their appointment and the methods by which their value will be assessed are properly agreed and documented, and subjected to regular review.

2. Capital Prudential Indicators 2023/24 – 2025/26

The Authority's capital expenditure plans are the key driver of treasury management activity. The output of the capital expenditure plans are reflected in prudential indicators:

2.1 Capital Expenditure

This prudential Indicator (Appendix E) is a summary of the Authority's capital expenditure plans, both those agreed previously, and those forming part of this budget cycle.

2.2 The Authority's Borrowing Need (the Capital Financing Requirement)

The second prudential indicator is the Authority's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). The CFR is simply the total historic outstanding capital expenditure which has not yet been paid for from either revenue or capital resources. It is essentially a measure of the Authority's indebtedness and so its underlying borrowing need. Any capital expenditure, which has not immediately been paid for, will increase the CFR, details are provided in Appendix G.

The CFR does not increase indefinitely, as the MRP is a statutory annual revenue charge which broadly reduces the indebtedness in line with each assets life, and so charges the economic consumption of capital assets as they are used.

2.3 Minimum Revenue Provision Statement

The Authority is required to pay off an element of the accumulated General Fund capital spend each year (the CFR) through a revenue charge (the minimum revenue provision - MRP), although it is also allowed to undertake additional voluntary payments if required (voluntary revenue provision - VRP).

DLUHC Regulations have been issued which require the full Authority to approve an MRP Statement in advance of each year. A variety of options are provided to Authorities, so long as there is a prudent provision. The Authority is recommended to approve the following MRP Statement

For all borrowing the MRP policy will be:

- **Asset Life Method** (Option 3) – MRP will be based on the estimated life of the assets, in accordance with the proposed regulations (this option must be applied for any expenditure capitalised under a Capitalisation Direction).

This option provides for a reduction in the borrowing need over approximately the assets life.

For 2015/16 onwards the proposed MRP policy has been amended to an Annuity basis which results in a reduction to the amount of revenue applied to provide for debt in the period 2015/16 to 2033/34 after which point the revenue applied increases compared to the current MRP approach through to 2054/55. The change does not increase the level of debt but means that the level of capital expenditure financed by borrowing, the Capital Financing Requirement will reduce more slowly in the earlier years as the amount of MRP is lower than the policy in 2014/15. However, the revised policy would ensure that the CFR would be repaid over a period of 40 years. If the current MRP approach continued there would be a balance outstanding of approximately £7m at the end of the 40-year period. It is not proposed to amend retrospectively any MRP recognised in previous years; this policy would apply from 2015/16 onwards.

In addition, the Authority can set aside amounts in excess of the minimum required. Consideration will continue to be given to more closely aligning external debt with the capital financing requirement by making a voluntary MRP contribution and/or using capital receipts. This would reduce the Authority's expenditure commitments in future years.

3. **Treasury Management Strategy - Borrowing**

The capital expenditure plans provide details of the activity of the Authority. The treasury management function ensures that the Authority's cash is organised in accordance with the relevant professional codes, so that sufficient cash is available to meet this activity. This will involve both the organisation of the cash flow and, where capital plans require, the organisation of appropriate borrowing facilities. The strategy covers the relevant treasury / prudential indicators, the current and projected debt positions and the annual investment strategy.

3.1 **Current Portfolio Position**

Within the prudential indicators there are a number of key indicators to ensure that the Authority operates its activities within well defined limits. One of these is that the Authority needs to ensure that its gross debt, does not, except in the short term, exceed the total of the CFR in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional CFR for 2023/24 and the following two financial years. This allows some flexibility for limited early borrowing for future years but ensures that borrowing is not undertaken for revenue or speculative purposes.

The Authority complied with this prudential indicator in the current year and does not envisage difficulties for the future. This view takes into account current commitments, existing plans, and the proposals in this report.

3.2 **Treasury Indicators: Limits to Borrowing Activity**

The Operational Boundary. This is the limit beyond which external debt is not normally expected to exceed. In most cases, this would be a similar figure to the CFR, but may be lower or higher depending on the levels of actual debt and the ability to fund under-borrowing by other cash resources.

2022/23 Estimate	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate
£37m	£36m	£35m	£33m

The Authorised Limit for External Debt. A further key prudential indicator represents a control on the maximum level of borrowing. This represents a limit beyond which external debt is prohibited, and this limit needs to be set or revised by the Authority. It reflects the level of external debt which, while not desired, could be afforded in the short term, but is not sustainable in the longer term.

1. This is the statutory limit determined under section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003. The Government retains an option to control either the total of all Authority's plans, or those of a specific Authority, although this power has not yet been exercised.
2. The Authority is asked to approve the following Authorised Limits:

2022/23 Estimate	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate
£40m	£39m	£38m	£36m

3.3 Prospects for Interest Rates

The Authority's Treasury Management functions are provided by Sandwell MBC who have appointed Link Asset Services as its treasury advisor and part of their service is to assist with formulating a view on interest rates. The following table and Appendix F1 gives Link Asset Services central view as at 19 December 2022.

Link Group Interest Rate View	19.12.22												
	Dec-22	Mar-23	Jun-23	Sep-23	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec-25
BANK RATE	3.50	4.25	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.00	3.75	3.50	3.25	3.00	2.75	2.50	2.50
3 month ave earnings	3.60	4.30	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.00	3.80	3.30	3.00	3.00	2.80	2.50	2.50
6 month ave earnings	4.20	4.50	4.60	4.50	4.20	4.10	3.90	3.40	3.10	3.00	2.90	2.60	2.60
12 month ave earnings	4.70	4.70	4.70	4.50	4.30	4.20	4.00	3.50	3.20	3.10	3.00	2.70	2.70
5 yr PWLB	4.20	4.20	4.20	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.80	3.60	3.50	3.40	3.30	3.20	3.10
10 yr PWLB	4.30	4.40	4.40	4.30	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.80	3.60	3.50	3.40	3.30	3.30
25 yr PWLB	4.60	4.60	4.60	4.50	4.40	4.20	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.70	3.60	3.50	3.50
50 yr PWLB	4.30	4.30	4.30	4.20	4.10	3.90	3.80	3.70	3.60	3.50	3.30	3.20	3.20

Link Asset Services central forecast for interest rates was updated on 19 December 2022 and reflected a view that the MPC would be keen to further demonstrate its anti-inflation credentials by delivering a succession of rate increases. Bank Rate stands at 4% currently but is expected to reach a peak of 4.5% in 2023.

Further down the road, Link Asset Services anticipate the Bank of England will be keen to loosen monetary policy when the worst of the inflationary pressures are behind us, but that timing will be one of fine judgment: cut too soon, and inflationary pressures may well build up further; cut too late and any downturn or recession may be prolonged.

The CPI measure of inflation looks to have peaked at 11.1% in Q4 2022. Despite the cost-of-living squeeze that is still taking shape, the Bank will want to see evidence that wages are not spiralling upwards in what is evidently a very tight labour market.

In the upcoming months, Link Asset Services forecasts will be guided not only by economic data releases and clarifications from the MPC over its monetary policies and the Government over its fiscal policies, but the on-going conflict between Russia and Ukraine. (More recently, the heightened tensions between China/Taiwan/US also have the potential to have a wider and negative economic impact.)

On the positive side, consumers are still estimated to be sitting on over £160bn of excess savings left over from the pandemic so that will cushion some of the impact of the above challenges. However, most of those are held by more affluent people whereas lower income families already spend nearly all their income on essentials such as food, energy and rent/mortgage payments.

3.4 Borrowing Strategy

The Authority is currently maintaining an under-borrowed position. This means that the capital borrowing need (the Capital Financing Requirement), has not been fully funded with loan debt as cash supporting the Authority's reserves, balances and cash flow has been used as a temporary measure. This strategy is prudent as medium and longer dated borrowing rates are expected to fall from their current levels once prevailing inflation concerns are addressed by tighter near-term monetary policy. That is, Bank Rate increases during 2022 and the first half of 2023.

Against this background and the risks within the economic forecast, caution will be adopted with the 2023/24 treasury operations. The Treasurer will monitor interest rates in financial markets and adopt a pragmatic approach to changing circumstances:

Treasury Management Limits on Activity

There are three debt related treasury activity limits. The purpose of these are to restrain the activity of the treasury function within certain limits, thereby managing risk and reducing the impact of any adverse movement in interest rates. However, if these are set to be too restrictive they will impair the opportunities to reduce costs/improve performance. The indicators are:

- Upper limits on variable interest rate exposure. This identifies a maximum limit for variable interest rates based upon the debt position net of investments
- Upper limits on fixed interest rate exposure. This is similar to the previous indicator and covers a maximum limit on fixed interest rates;
- Maturity structure of borrowing. These gross limits are set to reduce the Authority's exposure to large fixed rate sums falling due for refinancing and are required for upper and lower limits.

The Authority is asked to approve the following treasury indicators and limits:

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Interest rate Exposures			
	Upper	Upper	Upper
Limits on fixed interest rates based on net debt	160%	160%	160%
Limits on variable interest rates based on net debt	30%	30%	30%
Maturity Structure of fixed interest rate borrowing 2023/24			
	Lower	Upper	
Under 12 months	0%	20%	
12 months to 2 years	0%	20%	
2 years to 5 years	0%	25%	
5 years to 10 years	0%	50%	
10 years and above	0%	90%	
Maturity Structure of variable interest rate borrowing 2023/24			
	Lower	Upper	
Under 12 months	0%	20%	

12 months to 2 years	0%	20%
2 years to 5 years	0%	25%
5 years to 10 years	0%	50%
10 years and above	0%	90%

3.5 Policy on Borrowing in Advance of Need

The Authority will not borrow more than, or in advance of, its needs purely in order to profit from the investment of the extra sums borrowed. Any decision to borrow in advance will be within forward approved Capital Financing Requirement estimates, and will be considered carefully to ensure that value for money can be demonstrated and that the Authority can ensure the security of such funds.

Borrowing in advance will be made within the constraints that it will be limited to no more than 20% of the expected increase in borrowing need (CFR) over the three-year planning period. Risks associated with any borrowing in advance activity will be subject to prior appraisal and subsequent reporting through the mid-year or annual reporting mechanism.

3.6 Debt Rescheduling

Rescheduling of current borrowing in our debt portfolio is unlikely to occur as there is still a very large difference between premature redemption rates and new borrowing rates.

The reasons for any rescheduling to take place will include:

- the generation of cash savings and / or discounted cash flow savings;
- helping to fulfil the treasury strategy;
- enhance the balance of the portfolio (amend the maturity profile and/or the balance of volatility).

Consideration will also be given to identify if there is any residual potential for making savings by running down investment balances to repay debt prematurely as short term rates on investments are likely to be lower than rates paid on current debt.

All rescheduling will be reported to the Audit and Risk Committee through the mid-year or annual reporting mechanism.

3.7 New financial institutions as a source of borrowing and/or types of borrowing

Currently the PWLB Certainty Rate is set at gilts + 80 basis points for borrowing. However, consideration may still need to be given to sourcing funding from the following sources for the following reasons:

- Local authorities (primarily shorter dated maturities).
- Financial institutions (primarily insurance companies and pension funds).

Our advisors will keep us informed as to the relative merits of each of these alternative funding sources.

4 Annual Investment Strategy

4.1 Investment Policy

The Authority's investment policy has regard to the following:

- DLUHC's Guidance on Local Government Investments ("the Guidance").
- CIPFA Treasury Management in Public Services Code of Practice and Cross Sectoral Guidance Notes 2021 ("the Code").
- CIPFA Treasury Management Guidance Notes 2021.

The Authority's investment priorities will be security first, portfolio liquidity second and then yield (return).

The guidance from DLUHC and CIPFA place a high priority on the management of risk. The Authority will adopt a prudent approach to managing risk and defines its risk appetite by the following means:

Minimum acceptable credit criteria are applied in order to generate a list of highly creditworthy counterparties. This also enables diversification and thus avoidance of concentration risk. The key ratings used to monitor counterparties are the short term and long-term ratings.

Further, the Authority's and Sandwell MBC's officers recognise that ratings should not be the sole determinant of the quality of an institution and that it is important to continually assess and monitor the financial sector on both a micro and macro basis and in relation to the economic and political environments in which institutions operate. The assessment will also take account of information that reflects the opinion of the markets. To this end the Authority and Sandwell MBC will engage with its advisors to monitor the market.

Other information sources used will include the financial press, share price and other such information pertaining to the banking sector in order to establish the most robust scrutiny process on the suitability of potential investment counterparties.

Investment instruments identified for use in the financial year are listed in Appendix F2 under the 'Specified' and 'Non-Specified' Investments categories. Counterparty limits will be as set through the Authority's Treasury Management Practices – Schedules.

4.2 Creditworthiness policy

The primary principle governing the Authority's investment criteria is the security of its investments, although the yield or return on the investment is also a key consideration. After this main principle the Authority will ensure that:

- It maintains a policy covering both the categories of investment types it will invest in, criteria for choosing investment counterparties with adequate security, and monitoring their security. This is set out in the Specified and Non-Specified investment sections below; and
- It has sufficient liquidity in its investments. For this purpose, it will set out procedures for determining the maximum periods for which funds may prudently be committed. These procedures also apply to the Authority's prudential indicators covering the maximum principal sums invested.

A counterparty list will be maintained in compliance with the following criteria. These criteria are separate to that which determines which types of investment instrument are either Specified or Non-Specified as it provides an overall pool of counterparties considered high quality which the Authority may use, rather than defining what types of investment instruments are to be used.

Credit rating information is supplied by the Link Group, treasury consultants, on all active counterparties that comply with the criteria below. Any counterparty failing to meet the criteria would be omitted from the counterparty (dealing) list. Any rating changes, rating Watches (notification of a likely change), rating Outlooks (notification of a possible longer term change) are provided to Officers almost immediately after they occur and this information is considered before dealing. For instance, a negative rating Watch applying to a counterparty at the minimum Authority criteria will be suspended from use, with all others being reviewed in light of market conditions.

The criteria for providing a pool of high quality investment counterparties (both Specified and Non-specified investments) is:

- Banks 1 - good credit quality – the Authority will only use banks which:
 - i. are UK banks; and/or
 - ii. are non-UK and domiciled in a country which has a minimum sovereign long-term rating of AA+and have, as a minimum, the following Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's (S&P) credit ratings (where rated):
 - i. short term – F1, P-1, A-1 (Fitch, Moody's and S&P) respectively
 - ii. long term – A, A1 and A (Fitch, Moody's and S&P) respectively
- Banks 2 – Part nationalised UK banks – Royal Bank of Scotland. This bank can be included provided it continues to be part nationalised or it meets the ratings in Banks 1 above.
- Banks 3 – The Authority's own banker for transactional purposes if the bank falls below the above criteria, although in this case balances will be minimised in both monetary size and time invested.
- Building Societies. The Authority will use all Societies which meet the ratings for banks outlined above.
- Money Market Funds – AAA rated
- UK Government (including gilts, Treasury Bills and the Debt Management Account Deposit Facility (DMADF))
- Local Authorities, Parish Authorities, CCLA, etc
- Housing Associations
- Supranational institutions

Use of additional information other than credit ratings

Additional requirements under the Code require the Authority to supplement credit rating information. Whilst the above criteria relies primarily on the application of credit ratings to provide a pool of appropriate counterparties for officers to use, additional operational market information will be applied before making any specific investment decision from the agreed pool of counterparties. This additional market information (for example Credit Default Swaps, negative rating Watches/Outlooks) will be applied to compare the relative security of differing investment opportunities.

Creditworthiness

Significant levels of downgrades to short- and long-term credit ratings have not materialised since the crisis in March 2020. In the main, where they did change, any alterations were limited to Outlooks. However, more recently the UK sovereign debt rating has been placed on Negative Outlook by the three major rating agencies in the wake of the Truss/Kwarteng unfunded tax-cuts policy. Although the Sunak/Hunt government has calmed markets, the outcome of the rating agency reviews is unknown at present, but it is possible the UK sovereign debt rating would be downgraded.

4.3 Country and sector considerations - Due care will be taken to consider the country, group and sector exposure of the Authority's investments. In part the country selection will be chosen by the credit rating of the sovereign state in Banks 1 above. In addition:

- no more than 25% will be placed with any non-UK country at any time;
- limits in place above will apply to a group of companies;
- sector limits will be monitored regularly for appropriateness.

4.4 Investment Strategy

In-house funds. Investments will be made with reference to the core balance and cash flow requirements and the outlook for short-term interest rates (i.e. rates for investments up to 12 months). Greater returns are usually obtainable by investing for longer periods. The current shape of the yield curve suggests that is the case at present, but there is the prospect of Bank Rate peaking in the first half of 2023 and possibly reducing as early as the latter part of 2023 so an agile investment strategy would be appropriate to optimise returns.

Investment returns expectations. The current forecast includes a forecast for Bank Rate to reach 4.5% in Q2 2023.

Link Asset Services suggested budgeted investment earnings rates for returns on investments placed for periods up to about three months during each financial year are as follows:

Average earnings in each year	
2023/24	4.4%
2024/25	3.3%
2025/26	2.6%
2026/27	2.5%
Long term later years	2.8%

Investment treasury indicator and limit - total principal funds invested for greater than 364 days. These limits are set with regard to the Authority's liquidity requirements and to reduce the need for early sale of an investment, and are based on the availability of funds after each year-end.

The Authority is asked to approve the treasury indicator and limit: -

Maximum principal sums invested > 365 days			
£m	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Principal sums invested > 365 days	£25m	£25m	£25m

4.5 Investment Risk Benchmarking - These benchmarks are simple guides to maximum risk, so they may be breached from time to time, depending on movements in interest rates and counterparty criteria. The purpose of the benchmark is that officers will monitor the current and trend position and amend the operational strategy to manage risk as conditions change. Any breach of the benchmarks will be reported, with supporting reasons in the Mid-Year or Annual Report.

Security - The Authority's maximum security risk benchmark for the current portfolio, when compared to these historic default tables, is:

- 0.03% historic risk of default when compared to the whole portfolio.

Liquidity – in respect of this area the Authority seeks to maintain:

- Liquid short-term deposits of at least £20m available with a week's notice.
- Weighted Average Life benchmark is expected to be 0.25 years, with a maximum of 1.0 years.

Yield – local measures of yield benchmarks are:

- Investments – internal returns above the average SONIA (Sterling Overnight Index Average) rate.

And in addition, that the security benchmark for each individual year is:

	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years
Maximum	0.03%	0.12%	0.10%	0.08%	0.06%

Note: This benchmark is an average risk of default measure and would not constitute an expectation of loss against a particular investment.

4.6 End of year investment report. At the end of the financial year, the Authority will report on its investment activity as part of its Annual Treasury Report.

Interest Rate Forecast 2022 – 2025

Link Group Interest Rate View 19.12.22													
	Dec-22	Mar-23	Jun-23	Sep-23	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec-25
BANK RATE	3.50	4.25	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.00	3.75	3.50	3.25	3.00	2.75	2.50	2.50
3 month ave earnings	3.60	4.30	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.00	3.80	3.30	3.00	3.00	2.80	2.50	2.50
6 month ave earnings	4.20	4.50	4.60	4.50	4.20	4.10	3.90	3.40	3.10	3.00	2.90	2.60	2.60
12 month ave earnings	4.70	4.70	4.70	4.50	4.30	4.20	4.00	3.50	3.20	3.10	3.00	2.70	2.70
5 yr PWLB	4.20	4.20	4.20	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.80	3.60	3.50	3.40	3.30	3.20	3.10
10 yr PWLB	4.30	4.40	4.40	4.30	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.80	3.60	3.50	3.40	3.30	3.30
25 yr PWLB	4.60	4.60	4.60	4.50	4.40	4.20	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.70	3.60	3.50	3.50
50 yr PWLB	4.30	4.30	4.30	4.20	4.10	3.90	3.80	3.70	3.60	3.50	3.30	3.20	3.20

**TREASURY MANAGEMENT PRACTICE (TMP1) – CREDIT AND
COUNTERPARTY RISK MANAGEMENT**

The DLUHC issued Investment Guidance in 2018, and this forms the structure of the Authority's policy below. These guidelines do not apply to either trust funds or pension funds which operate under a different regulatory regime.

The key intention of the Guidance is to maintain the current requirement for Authorities to invest prudently, and that priority is given to security and liquidity before yield. In order to facilitate this objective, the guidance requires this Authority to have regard to the CIPFA publication Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice and Cross-Sectoral Guidance Notes. This Authority has adopted the Code and will continue to apply its principles to all investment activity. In accordance with the Code, the Treasurer has produced its Treasury Management Practices (TMPs). This part, TMP1, covering investment counterparty policy requires approval each year.

Annual Investment Strategy – The key requirements of both the Code and the investment guidance are to set an annual investment strategy, as part of its annual treasury strategy for the following year, covering the identification and approval of following:

- The strategy guidelines for choosing and placing investments, particularly non-specified investments.
- The principles to be used to determine the maximum periods for which funds can be committed.
- Specified investments that the Authority will use. These are high security (i.e. high credit rating, although this is defined by the Authority, and no guidelines are given), and high liquidity investments in sterling and with a maturity of no more than a year.
- Non-specified investments, clarifying the greater risk implications, identifying the general types of investment that may be used and a limit to the overall amount of various categories that can be held at any time.

The investment policy proposed for the Authority is:

Strategy Guidelines – The main strategy guidelines are contained in the body of the treasury strategy statement.

Specified Investments – These investments are sterling investments of not more than one-year maturity, or those which could be for a longer period but where the Authority has the right to be repaid within 12 months if it wishes. These are considered low risk assets where the possibility of loss of principal or investment income is small. These would include sterling investments which would not be defined as capital expenditure with:

1. The UK Government (such as the Debt Management Account deposit facility, UK Treasury Bills or a Gilt with less than one year to maturity).
2. Supranational bonds of less than one year's duration.
3. A local authority, housing association, parish Authority, CCLA or community Authority.
4. Pooled investment vehicles (such as money market funds) that have been awarded a high credit rating by a credit rating agency.
5. A body that is considered of a high credit quality (such as a bank or building society).

For category 5 this covers bodies with a minimum short-term rating of AA (or the equivalent) as rated by Standard and Poor's, Moody's or Fitch rating agencies. Within these bodies, and in accordance with the Code, the Authority has set additional criteria to set the time and amount of monies which will be invested in these bodies. This criteria is as per the "Investment Counter Party and Liquidity Framework".

Non-Specified Investments – Non-specified investments are any other type of investment (i.e. not defined as Specified above). The identification and rationale supporting the selection of these other investments and the maximum limits to be applied are set out below. Non-specified investments would include any sterling investments with:

	Non-Specified Investment Category	Limit (£ or %)
a	<p>Supranational Bonds greater than 1 year to maturity</p> <p>(a) Multilateral development bank bonds - These are bonds defined as an international financial institution having as one of its objects economic development, either generally or in any region of the world (e.g. European Reconstruction and Development Bank etc.).</p> <p>(b) A financial institution that is guaranteed by the United Kingdom Government (e.g. National Rail)</p> <p>The security of interest and principal on maturity is on a par with the Government and so very secure. These bonds usually provide returns above equivalent gilt-edged securities. However, the value of the bond may rise or fall before maturity and losses may accrue if the bond is sold before maturity.</p>	<p>30%</p> <p>AAA long term ratings</p>
b	<p>Gilt edged securities with a maturity of greater than one year. These are Government bonds and so provide the highest security of interest and the repayment of principal on maturity. Similar to category (a) above, the value of the bond may rise or fall before maturity and losses may accrue if the bond is sold before maturity.</p>	30%
c	<p>The Authority's own banker if it fails to meet the basic credit criteria. In this instance balances will be minimised as far as is possible.</p>	20%
d	<p>Building societies not meeting the basic security requirements under the specified investments. The operation of some building societies does not require a credit rating, although in every other respect the security of the society would match similarly sized societies with ratings. The Authority may use such building societies which were originally considered Eligible Institutions.</p>	20%
e	<p>Any bank or building society that has a minimum long-term credit rating of AA-, for deposits with a maturity of greater than one year</p>	3 years and £30m

The Monitoring of Investment Counterparties – The credit rating of counterparties will be monitored regularly. The Authority receives credit rating information (changes, rating watches and rating outlooks) from the Link Group as and when ratings change, and counterparties are checked promptly. On occasion ratings may be downgraded when an investment has already been made. The criteria used are such that a minor downgrading should not affect the full receipt of the principal and interest. Any counterparty failing to meet the criteria will be removed from the list immediately, and if required new counterparties which meet the criteria will be added to the list.

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS**

1. The actual capital expenditure that was incurred in 2021/22 and the estimates of capital expenditure to be incurred for the current and future years that are recommended for approval are:

2021/22 £000 Actual	2022/23 £000 Estimate	2023/24 £000 Estimate	2024/25 £000 Estimate	2025/26 £000 Estimate
3,189	3,333	9,191	6,255	4,377

2. Estimates of the ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream for the current and future years, and the actual figures for 2021/22 are:

2021/22 % Actual	2022/23 % Estimate	2023/24 % Estimate	2024/25 % Estimate	2025/26 % Estimate
2.56	2.04	1.82	1.81	1.55

The estimates of financing costs include current commitments and the proposals in this budget report.

3. All borrowing forecasts contained within this report relate only to supported capital expenditure, which receives Government grant support. Consequently, the incremental impact of any borrowing arising from new capital investment decisions has been reflected within the overall budget projections, although the impact specifically on the level of precept cannot be quantified.
4. Estimates of the end of year capital financing requirement for the Authority for the current and future years and the actual financing requirements at 31 March 2022 are:

31/03/22 £000 Actual	31/03/23 £000 Estimate	31/03/24 £000 Estimate	31/03/25 £000 Estimate	31/03/26 £000 Estimate
34,327	33,271	32,149	30,953	29,955

5. The capital financing requirement measures the Authority's underlying need to borrow for a capital purpose. In accordance with best professional practice, West Midlands Fire & Rescue Authority does not associate borrowing with particular items or types of expenditure. The Authority relies upon Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council to undertake its treasury management function, which has an integrated treasury management strategy and has adopted the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management in the Public Service. West Midlands Fire & Rescue Authority has, at any point in time, a number of cash flows both positive and negative and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council manages its treasury position in terms of its borrowings and investments in accordance with its approved treasury management strategy and practices. In day to day cash management, no distinction can be made between revenue cash and capital cash. External borrowing arises as a consequence of all the financial transactions of the Authority and not simply those arising from capital spending. In contrast, the capital financing requirement reflects the Authority's underlying need to borrow for a capital purpose.
6. CIPFA's Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities includes the following as a key indicator of prudence.

"In order to ensure that over the medium-term net borrowing will only be for a capital purpose, the local authority should ensure that net external borrowing does not, except in the short term, exceed the total of capital financing requirement in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional capital financing requirement for the current and next two financial years."

The Authority had no difficulty meeting this requirement in 2021/22, nor are any difficulties envisaged for the current or future years. This view takes into account current commitments, existing plans, and the proposals in this budget report.

7. In respect of its external debt, it is recommended that the Authority approves the following authorised limits for its total external debt gross of investments for the next three financial years and agrees the continuation of the previously agreed limit for the current year since no change to this is necessary.

2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000
42,000	40,000	39,000	38,000	36,000

8. These authorised limits are consistent with the Authority's current commitments, existing plans and the proposals in this budget report for capital expenditure and financing and with approved treasury management policy statement and practices. They are based on the estimate of most likely, prudent but not worst case scenario, with in addition sufficient headroom over and above this to allow for operational management, for example unusual cash movements. Risk analysis and risk management strategies have been taken into account; as have plans for capital expenditure, estimates of the capital financing requirement and estimates of cash flow requirements for all purposes.
9. The Authority is also asked to approve the following operational boundary for external debt for the same time period. The proposed operational boundary for external debt is based on the same estimates as the authorised limit but reflects directly the estimate of the most likely, prudent but not worst case scenario, without the additional headroom included within the authorised limit to allow for example for unusual cash movement, and equates to the maximum of external debt projected by this estimate. The operational boundary represents a key management tool for in year monitoring.

2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000
38,000	37,000	36,000	35,000	33,000

10. The Authority's actual borrowing at 31 March 2022 was £31.5m. It should be noted that actual long-term liabilities are not directly comparable to the authorised limit and operational boundary, since the actual long-term liabilities reflects the position at one point in time.
11. In taking its decisions on this budget report, the Authority is asked to note that the authorised limit determined for 2022/2023 (see paragraph 7 above) will be the statutory limit determined under section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 2003.

APPENDIX H

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

NET EXPENDITURE BUDGET FORECAST 2024/2025 TO 2025/2026

	Budget 2024/25	Budget 2025/26
Subjective Heading	£000s	£000s
Employees	108,500	111,500
Premises	7,700	7,800
Transport	2,200	2,300
Supplies & Services	9,800	10,000
Capital Financing	7,900	7,900
Income	(10,100)	(10,100)
Appropriations	(5,500)	(5,500)
NET EXPENDITURE	120,500	123,900
Available Funding	120,500	123,900
Surplus/(Deficit)	-	-

Note

Budget forecast for 2024/25 and 2025/26 assume:

- A Council Tax increase of 3% in 2024/25 and 2025/26.
- Inflation assumptions as shown on Appendix H2.
- Continuation of Section 31 government grant to fund employer's firefighter pension contribution increase.

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

INFLATION ASSUMPTIONS

Pay Awards:		%
- Uniformed Staff		
	July 23	5.0
	July 24	3.0
	July 25	2.0
- Non-Uniformed Staff		
	April 23	5.0
	April 24	3.0
	April 25	2.0
General Prices:		
	April 23	2.0
	April 24	2.0
	April 25	2.0
Pensions Increase Order:		
	April 23	10.1
	April 24	3.4
	April 25	1.6
Residential Rents:		
	April 23	2.5
	April 24	2.0
	April 25	2.0

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS

The approximate annual impact of a 1% variation in some of the key assumptions underpinning the budget projections is shown below:

Expenditure

Uniformed pay awards	£800k (£600k part year)
Employers Firefighters Pension Contribution	£460k
Interest payable	£305k
Non-uniformed pay award	£170k
General inflation	£85k
Energy costs	£22k
Fuel	£11k

Income

Core Funding	£570k
Council Tax	£540k
Interest receivable	£390k

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**SCENARIO ANALYSIS**

In the Secretary of State for DLUHC provisional settlement announcement in December 2022 for 2023/24, there was no indication of further funding levels beyond 2023/24. In planning for 2024/25 onwards, a year-on-year increase of 2% has been assumed in 2024/25 and 2025/26 to the core funding. However, it is recognised that funding may be at a higher or lower level than this. For illustration, the impact of a 4% increase or 2% decrease to the core funding is shown below in the following Tables.

Core Funding Increases/Reductions

Financial Year	£ Core Funding	% Increase/ (Reduction)	£ Increase/ (Reduction)
2015/16	61,943,000		
2016/17	58,665,000	-5.3%	-3,278,000
2017/18	54,703,000	-6.8%	-3,962,000
2018/19	53,030,000	-3.1%	-1,673,000
2019/20	52,048,000	-1.9%	-982,000
2020/21	52,896,000	+1.6%	+848,000
2021/22	53,002,000	+0.2%	+106,000
2022/23	53,590,000	+1.1%	+588,000
2023/24	56,867,000	+6.1%	+3,277,000
2024/25	58,004,000	+2.0%	+1,137,000

2025/26	59,164,000	+2.0%	+1,160,000
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Core Funding increase of 4% in 2024/25 and 2025/26

Financial Year	£ Core Funding	% Increase/ (Reduction)	£ Increase/ (Reduction)
2023/24	56,867,000		
2024/25	59,142,000	+4.0%	+2,275,000
2025/26	61,508,000	+4.0%	+2,366,000

Core Funding Reduction of 2% in 2023/24 and 2024/25

Financial Year	£ Core Funding	% Increase/ (Reduction)	£ Increase/ (Reduction)
2023/24	56,867,000		
2024/25	55,730,000	-2.0%	-1,137,000
2025/26	54,615,000	-2.0%	-1,115,000

A 1% movement in 2023/24 core funding equates to approximately £570k.

APPENDIX J

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

RESERVES STRATEGY

	31/03/22 £000s	31/03/23 £000s	31/03/24 £000s	31/03/25 £000s	31/03/26 £000s	31/03/27 £000s
Corporate Funding						
Forecast Capital Program Shortfall	9,368	5,852	0	0	0	0
Insurance Reserve	6,732	3,732	3,732	3,732	3,732	3,732
Detriments	2,000	1,000	0	0	0	0
NNDR & Local Tax Income Guarantee	1,995	0	0	0	0	0
Sustainability	180	100	0	0	0	0
Operations						
Tech Rescue	846	0	0	0	0	0
Project Management/Support	173	0	0	0	0	0
UK ISAR	45	0	0	0	0	0
Partnerships	36	0	0	0	0	0
Fire Control & Business Continuity						
Command Delivery	27	17	0	0	0	0
Prevention						
Education Materials/Facilities	94	0	0	0	0	0
Community Partnerships	91	72	0	0	0	0
Community Safety	18	0	0	0	0	0
Protection						
Building Risk Review Programme	401	0	0	0	0	0
Protection Fund Grant	329	0	0	0	0	0
Fire Safety	91	0	0	0	0	0
Project Management/Support	85	60	0	0	0	0
Response, Policy & Organisational Assurance						
Procurement of Operational Equip	2,471	3,235	0	0	0	0
Command Delivery	360	100	0	0	0	0
CBRN	249	150	100	50	0	0
SSRI/RIDGE	135	0	0	0	0	0
Tech Rescue	45	0	0	0	0	0
COVID-19 Funding	19	0	0	0	0	0
Resourcing						
Property Maintenance	679	479	0	0	0	0
Pension Admin Grant	236	200	0	0	0	0
Vehicle Chargers	78	0	0	0	0	0
Agile Working	60	47	0	0	0	0
Loss of Use Recovery	10	10	0	0	0	0
Digital & Data						
ESMCP	1,252	1,020	750	450	200	0
Other Digital Transformations/Upgrades	560	0	0	0	0	0
Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)	556	0	0	0	0	0
Staffing	298	165	0	0	0	0
Incident Reporting System (IRS)/Command	139	139	0	0	0	0

Continued.....	31/03/22 £000s	31/03/23 £000s	31/03/24 £000s	31/03/25 £000s	31/03/26 £000s	31/03/27 £000s
Communications & Engagement						
Community Engagement	10	0	0	0	0	0
Comms/Media Events	2	0	0	0	0	0
Employee Relations						
Project Management/Support	4	0	0	0	0	0
Organisational Learning & People Development						
Staff Training & Development	47	0	0	0	0	0
Health, Safety & Wellbeing						
Health, Safety & Wellbeing	58	0	0	0	0	0
Staffing	37	0	0	0	0	0
Total Earmarked Reserves	29,816	16,378	4,582	4,232	3,932	3,732
General Reserve	3.858	3.858	3.858	3.858	3.858	3.858
% Net Revenue Budget	3.6%	3.2%	3.2%	3.1%	3.0%	3.0%
Total Reserves	33,674	20,236	8,440	8,090	7,790	7,590

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**13 FEBRUARY 2023****1. THREE YEAR ROLLING STRATEGY 2023-26 AND ANNUAL PLAN**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT Members note the ongoing progress and in year deliverables of the evidence-based Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) objectives, as set out in 3.3-3.8.5.
- 1.2 THAT Members reaffirm the Authority's Vision for the Authority's three-year rolling strategy, as set out in 3.13.2.
- 1.3 THAT Members approve the three-year strategic objectives 2023-26 and refresh of the annual plan priorities for delivery in 2023-24, as set out in 3.14.5.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 This report is submitted to Members to provide an overview of the progression of CRMP objectives and what we are committing to deliver within the third year of our planning cycle (as approved by Members in 2021).
- 2.2 The report will also set out the review of the Authority's Vision and Strategic objectives and annual priorities that set the context for the three-year rolling strategy.

3. BACKGROUND**3.1 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP)**

- 3.1.1 On 14 February 2022, the Fire Authority approved the latest iteration of the three-year rolling strategy for 2022-25 and noted

the ongoing progress against the evidence based CRMP objectives first approved by the Authority in 2021. In 2023/24, the CRMP will be due for its three yearly refresh and will be subject to public consultation and work is already underway on this process.

- 3.1.2 The Service is required by the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework to ensure our CRMP covers “at least a three-year time span and be reviewed and revised as often as it is necessary”. We are 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”.
- 3.1.3 West Midlands Fire Service achieves these requirements by firstly reviewing and updating the CRMP as a risk analysis on an ongoing basis, but also undertaking a three yearly refresh which includes public consultation. The service publishes our rolling three yearly strategic plan – known as “Our Plan” – as a means of outlining how we will address the risks identified within the CRMP to the public. For members’ information, a copy of Our Plan can be accessed on the WMFS website here: <https://www.wmfs.net/our-plan/>.

The Service has eight Planning Principles that encompass our approach to CRMP. These are:

- to continue to evolve our delivery of risk-based services aligned to the needs of local communities.
- to create opportunities and make the best use of our resources to effectively manage changing risk.
- to sustain our delivery of risk-based services to local communities
- maintain and enhance our ‘outstanding’ response services.
- to enable sustainable and resilient services for now and the future
- maintain and expand our offer to partners and communities, delivering services which are in the communities’ interest.
- manage Health and Safety considerations within existing arrangements, ensuring safe systems of work.

- deliver the most effective CRMP working with our staff.

3.2 **CRMP Objectives**

3.2.1 In recognition of both the changing CRMP, the role of a fire and rescue service and government expectations; following a review of our CRMP undertaken throughout 2020 and a period of public consultation undertaken in late 2020, the Fire Authority approved the progression of the following 6 CRMP objectives:

- Risk Based Crewing
- Dynamic Mobilising
- Automatic Fire Alarms
- Blended Fleet
- Reducing Health Inequalities
- Emerging Risks

3.2.2 These CRMP projects continue to be delivered and will continue to be a priority in our annual plan. The focus of these CRMP projects continues 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.

3.3 **CRMP Objective Updates**

Risk-Based Crewing

3.3.1 Risk-Based Crewing (RBC) 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.

3.3.2 This CRMP objective focuses on lower risk incidents such as secondary fires or special service calls. Empowering 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.

3.3.3 Following a successful trial period, RBC was rolled out to 11 core BRV stations from April 2022 as part of business-as-usual

operations. Staff have provided ongoing feedback to shape and inform the RBC concept throughout.

- 3.3.4 Evaluation of the project has seen a 60% increase in BRV availability.
- 3.3.5 A BRV has been mobilised with two personnel 32% of times and 84% of all secondary incidents have been attended by a BRV enabling a more proportionate response to incidents, aligned to risk.
- 3.3.6 During the extreme heat experienced last summer, RBC enabled us to flexibly use our resources and effectively manage the significant increase in demand and spare conditions. The concept has shown the benefits that risk-based crewing can have on managing risk within our communities.

Next steps/in year deliverables:

- 3.3.7 Following the success of the roll out of risk-based crewing across all of our core BRV stations, the next steps of this project will see us exploring further opportunities to develop RBC across our Service Delivery Model.
- 3.3.8 Over the next 12 months the Service will commit to delivering against the following.
 - Further develop our approach to RBC across our Service Delivery Model.
 - The trial of a low-risk vehicle concept to further enhance RBC. This will be an additional vehicle at certain locations that will support a more proportionate response to low-risk incidents, whilst enhancing our capacity to deliver key prevention and protection activities to some of our most vulnerable communities.
 - Build on the recommendations of Dynamic Mobilising to explore innovative technology and equipment for our resources with reduced crewing to further support an assertive, effective and safe response at all incidents.
- 3.3.9 Although not the key driver for progressing this work, the savings generated from this approach can contribute towards in year efficiency requirements.

3.4 **Dynamic Mobilising**

- 3.4.1 The Dynamic Mobilising project has delivered research to support evidence-based decision making across all CRMP objectives, most notably Risk Based Crewing and Blended Fleet. The project has worked with a range of data sets, modelling, research, job cycles adopted by FRS as well as academic institutions and sector subject matter experts to assure the approach and findings.
- 3.4.2 This research has endeavoured to understand the factors which contribute to the level of risk that high-risk category 1 incidents present to:
- crews.
 - the public.
 - businesses.
 - the environment.
- 3.4.3 This has enabled us to 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 hope is that this will inform improved outcomes for these stakeholders as well as the role our attendance times play in determining people/resource requirements.
- 3.4.4 Initial data collection took place between December 2021 into early 2022 to provide the necessary information to undertake a correlation analysis of what factors may either increase or decrease the risk presented by a category 1 incident.
- 3.4.5 Fire safety modelling was completed in February–March 2022 using software that can predict smoke, temperature, carbon monoxide and other substances during fires in order to gather data on temperature and conditions within the fire compartment. Fire Control research was also undertaken during this time period.
- 3.4.6 Live burn scenarios took place in April 2022 to validate the computer modelling previously undertaken.

Next steps/in year deliverables

- 3.4.7 As outlined above, the Dynamic mobilising project has delivered against its original brief, to deliver research that will enable evidence-based decisions to be made across all incident types. This research proposed a number of recommendations that have been presented to our Strategic Enabling Team, from which the Service have committed to the following.

A review of Fire Control to include:

- exploring how we can enable Fire Control to gather further information during a call to support dynamic mobilising.
- understanding whether further questioning and information gathering (after mobilising the initial response) can support Dynamic Mobilising and support assertive, effective and safe firefighting.
- delivery of further fire behaviour training to Fire Control, empowering them to make critical mobilisation decisions when viewing 999 eye.

A review of how we collect data and measure response targets:

- Expanding on the data collected through post-incident workbooks to further develop organisational awareness and support the development of Economic and Social value of FRS activities.
- Understanding the benefits of placing performance indicators on the weight of attack element through attendance standards for supporting vehicles.

- 3.4.8 The above will support the Service in its aspiration to move from pre-defined levels of response, to embedding the principles of people-based mobilising through effective, evidence based dynamic mobilising decisions across all of our incident types. The goal being to ensure all of our incidents are resourced proportionality to the known risk posed to our communities and our firefighters.

3.5 **Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs)**

3.5.1 The AFA project seeks to review our dynamic mobilising approach to AFAs to ensure we only send a response when required. This in turn will allow our firefighters to be increasingly available to support with Community Risk Reduction (CRR) activities, reducing risk and harm in the community.

To date the AFA project has delivered:

- 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 PRL will not attend unless there are additional reasons. As part of this change, training has been provided to hospitals, as well as to Fire Control to support this introduction.

Since their introduction on 12th September 2022, we have seen a 25% reduction in the use of PRLs at AFAs, meaning these key resources have remained available for our highest risk incidents.

Next steps/in year deliverables

3.5.2 The final phase of this project will see a revised our approach to residential care homes, applying dynamic mobilising to all AFAs 24/7, maintaining the most proportionate Level of Response, minimising the impact on our core fleet.

3.5.3 As this project draws to a close, the focus of our next steps will be on evaluation. This will enable us to fully understand the impact amending our approach to the three specific building types has had ensuring we, and more importantly our communities, are seeing a measurable benefit.

3.6 **Blended Fleet**

3.6.1 This project aims to work across the CRMP and its objectives, to continuously explore the opportunities these present in transforming our use of resources and how these can be further enhanced, through adapting and changing our fleet and how it is used.

- 3.6.2 Critical to the future of our blended fleet is not only how it can adapt to changing approaches to the delivery of prevention, protection and response activities but also how external influencing factors such as innovation, sector research and environmental considerations will impact the type of vehicles required for the future.
- 3.6.3 As with all our CRMP objectives, the aim of blended fleet is to achieve risk reduction activities through prevention, protection and response in an assertive, effective and safe way, continuing to provide an outstanding 5-minute response to high-risk incidents.
- 3.6.4 The initial phase of this CRMP objective has sought to identify potential changes to the resourcing and use of the WMFS current fleet, to support the future implementation of AFAs, RBC and the review of attendance to Road Traffic Collisions (RTC).
- 3.6.5 Following stakeholder engagement and full consultation via the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) changes were made in relation to non-persons reported RTC incidents from 07/11/22. This involved the re-classification of non-person reported RTCs to further support flexibility of RBC in this incident type.
- 3.6.6 Since implementation, a BRV has been mobilised to 16.4% of RTC incidents, previously, this was 1%. This change further supports a proportionate response to low-risk incidents, to enable resources to remain available for category 1 incidents, as well as key prevention activities.
- 3.6.7 Another area of work delivered through Blended Fleet is to support the evolution of the BRV replacement programme. The team have gained feedback regarding the current fleet, to help inform future vehicle and equipment requirements.
- 3.6.8 The team, working with wider stakeholders, have developed Blended Fleet Principles to ensure the Blended Fleet project aligns and complements other CRMP projects, these include:
1. develop a fleet that supports people-based mobilising, facilitating a proportionate and flexible response to all incident types
 2. empowering our people, to select the most appropriate

resource for the type of risk reduction activity they are undertaking.

3. commitment to continually developing the fleet which enables us to play our part in protecting the environment.

Next steps/in year deliverables:

- 3.6.9 The Blended Fleet project will continue to support delivery across all of our CRMP priorities.

3.7 Reducing Health Inequalities

- 3.7.1 The CRMP and 3 year Rolling Strategy February 2021 Authority report, highlighted the link between health status of an individual and Fire and Rescue related risks such as fire and WMFS's 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.

- 3.7.2 The Reducing Health Inequalities objective 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.

- 3.7.3 In January 2022, the renewed Prevention Policy was published which helped in the understanding of the role of Prevention and how, by delivering a more people centred and evidence-based approach to Prevention activities, we can better achieve the Prevention objectives set out within "Our Plan," which were identified through our CRMP process.

- 3.7.4 Digital Safe and Wells have also been launched, providing opportunity to more effectively expand and extend risk reduction activity.

- 3.7.5 One of the key objects for the Reducing Health Inequalities CRMP Project was to gain greater understanding on the impact

our Prevention work has on reducing vulnerability to fire within our communities.

3.7.6 During March 2022, surveys were sent to Safe and Well service users to help understand the effectiveness of the visits. The surveys demonstrate that safe and well visits do reduce risk and vulnerability to fire through behaviour and lifestyle changes. In doing so, they evidence that these changes are making a positive difference to people's health, wellbeing, and quality of life. For example:

- of those where there was a smoker in the household, 95% said that they had a greater understanding of the risks associated with smoking.
- 15% of the people who told us they had been referred to stop smoking services confirmed that they had stopped smoking.
- 26% told us they smoke more safely because of the visit
- 91% of those where falls risk was identified said that they had a greater understanding of the risks of falling
- of those who were not testing their smoke alarm, 100% of tenants were now testing their smoke alarm
- 70% reduction in chip pan usage

Next steps/in year deliverables:

3.7.7 We know that tackling those health inequalities that exist within our most vulnerable communities is a key to reducing risk and vulnerability to fires and other emergencies. We also know that the current cost of living crisis, longer-term consequences of COVID and impacts of climate change will only exacerbate those inequalities that already impact the most vulnerable.

3.7.8 For these reasons our focus will continue to be 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 'up stream' approach to firefighting.

3.7.9 Over the next 12 months the Service will commit to develop and implement the following:

- brief interventions for Winter warmth, Smoking and Falls Prevention

- proactive contact strategy and protocols
- social prescribing offer for health partner organisations
- clear “Health” offer for partner organisations
- the complete roll out of Tymly for Prevention activities.

3.8 **Emerging Risks**

- 3.8.1 The Emerging Risks CRMP objective recognised the future impact of external and environmental changes and events which will impact on how we deliver our services as well as the skills required of our people to achieve this to ensure continued preparedness.
- 3.8.2 As of 1st May 2022, the third Technical Rescue Station located at Sutton Coldfield was opened. Recruitment took place for officers outside of TRU as well as external firefighters from other services to increase diversity within the unit.
- 3.8.3 To date TRU have recruited 28 new staff, increasing the diversity within the unit. TRU has seen a 100% increase in those from BAME backgrounds, 200% increase in females and will continue to promote diversity. As well as an increase in diversity, TRU have successfully recruited five external applicants who all bring diverse skill sets and ways of thinking.
- 3.8.4 In addition to the third TRU station, the Prevent Strategy was a key element of the Emerging Risk project. West Midlands Police Counter Terrorism Unit (WMP CTU) and the West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) have developed training sessions for WMFS staff that will enable uniformed and non-uniformed staff to recognise and refer concerns related to extremism - under the remit of safeguarding.
- 3.8.5 The sessions are localised to highlight current trends and ensure the training is relevant and appropriate for all staff. The training commenced in January 2023 and will conclude in February 2023.
- 3.8.6 Alongside West Midlands Police, WMFS also attend the local Prevent Delivery Group and Prevent Regional meetings to promote our training proposal, seek best practise and to work with local authorities around the Prevent theme.

Next steps/in year deliverables

- 3.8.7 We continue to horizon scan to identify those new and emerging risks that may have an impact on the risk landscape of our communities and the services we provide. As outlined above, our risk analysis from 2020 saw us focusing on the impacts of external and environmental changes such as the impacts of climate change in the types of incident we attend, the development of the built environment and the growing threat of marauding terrorist incidents. This led us to the opening of a third technical rescue station at Sutton Coldfield to increase our resilience to these, types of scenarios.
- 3.8.8 As this project comes to a close, the focus will turn to evaluating the impact, but also to identifying the next range of emerging risks that may impact on the delivery of our service.

3.9 Developing CRMP Themes

- 3.9.1 As stated earlier, our CRMP is due its three yearly refresh and work has already started on understanding those emerging themes that will shape our strategy moving forwards. This analysis has identified the following themes.
- Business Continuity and Resilience – an increase in disruptive events such as protests, international disputes, social disruption, supply chain issues, loss of utilities, climate change, cyber-attacks.
 - Emerging Technologies – the drive for sustainability to negate climate change is creating emerging technologies such as Lithium-Ion Batteries, hydrogen, Large Energy Storage Systems and new building construction methodologies in the built environment.
 - Cost of Living – vulnerability is going to continue to rise with the impact of the cost of living, leading to increased community risk and frequency and severity of incidents. Exasperating underlying social inequalities that we know increase our communities risk to fire and other emergencies.

- Sustainability and Net Zero - WMFS recognises that not only do our activities impact on the environment but changes in the environment may impact on our operational response. Sustainability not solely focused on the environment but is a service wider eco system where opportunities are founded by working together, streamlining processes and ways of working leading to a more effective and efficient service. As role models within our communities and to meet external targets, we see sustainability becoming an overarching theme across all elements of our Strategy, enabling all areas of the services to adapt or adopt new approaches to safer communities.

These themes will form the bases of future CRMP proposals and are likely to feature within our public consultation.

3.10 **Strategic Influences**

In the progression of the CRMP, it has been critical to understand the potential impact of external influences. Some of the key influences are summarised below.

3.10.1 **Fire Reform White Paper**

In May 2022 the Government published their long-awaited fire reform white paper, setting out proposals to introduce reform in three areas; People, Professionalism and Governance. The consultation process for the white paper ran from May to July 2022 and both WMFS senior officers and WMFRA provided responses. The Government is yet to respond.

Key proposals include the implementation of operational independence and corporation sole for chief fire officers on a statutory basis, the creation of a College of Fire to drive professional standards and changes to the National Joint Council apparatus used to negotiate pay and conditions. WMFS continues to monitor these reform proposals and understand their potential impact on the CRMP and our service provision.

3.10.2 **UK Government Resilience Framework**

The UK Government Resilience Framework – previously commonly referred to as the resilience strategy – was published

in December 2022. This sets out the Government's proposals to strengthen the country's resilience systems and capabilities. This includes proposals in a number of areas both directly and indirectly impacting on the working of WMFS and the delivery of our CRMP.

This includes areas such as reform and strengthening of Local Resilience Forums, the development of a Resilience Academy and a national resilience function and driving greater resilience standards in the private sector. Many of the targets included within the Framework commit the government to action by 2025, with all aspects delivered by 2030.

3.10.3 Manchester Arena Inquiry, Grenfell Tower Inquiry and London Fire Brigade Cultural Review

All three of these reviews/inquiries have been closely analysed by the service with a view to learning lessons and implementing relevant recommendations. Further recommendations are expected from phase two of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry later in 2023 and a similar approach will be taken to evaluate and implement such recommendations as apply to WMFS or could help improve our policies and processes.

The learning from the Manchester Arena Inquiry will continue to influence our approach to collaboration with our blue light partners and neighbouring emergency services. Nationally led learning on areas such as JESIP will be considered and integrated into our approach as necessary. The London Fire Brigade Cultural Review will be analysed by the service to provide assurance. Our Values are enabling us to effectively achieve our vision and deliver our strategy in an environment that allows everyone to thrive.

3.10.4 Building Safety Act 2022

The Building Safety Act entered into law between April and October 2022, introducing a raft of new requirements not only for WMFS but for Responsible Persons, Local Authorities, developers and the newly created Building Safety Regulator. The Act aims to address a number of the issues highlighted within the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and subsequent reviews of the safety of high-rise residential properties. The Act introduces a

range of new processes and intervention points in the approval and construction of high-rise residential buildings (seven stories or over 18m). WMFS fire safety expertise will be required to support these new requirements.

3.11 **Single Year Settlement, Value for Money and Productivity**

- 3.11.1 As with previous years, the provision of a one-year financial settlement for 2023-24 does not enable the effective long term planning and delivery of a multi-year rolling strategy. The Authority's three-year rolling strategy and CRMP require both investment and efficiencies to be made over the short and medium term, but this is limited by central government's current approach to local government financing.
- 3.11.2 Our CRMP is central to meeting our requirements to deliver value for money. The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework sets out a clear requirement under section 5 for fire and rescue authorities to achieve value for money by managing their budgets and ensuring the efficient and effective use of their resources. This includes regular review of the numbers and deployment of firefighters and other staff, as well as our procurement of goods and services and commitment to national and local transformation programmes and partnerships.
- 3.11.3 The Home Office has also more recently emphasised a desire to see improvements in the productivity of fire and rescue services, setting the sector a 3% annual productivity improvement target. As part of their drive towards greater productivity and efficiency, and linked to flexibilities relating to council tax precept, Ministers have requested that services publish, in March 2023, further information on their future efficiency plans and proposals which are designed to improve service productivity. The CRMP and specifically the projects delivered as part of it are a key means of delivering against this requirement.

3.12 **Three Year Rolling Strategy – Vision, Strategic Objectives, Priorities and Goals**

Our Vision

The three-year strategic objectives 2022-25 remain as set out

below.

Response: Dealing excellently with incidents

Prevention: Delivering services that reduce risk and support safer and healthier communities

Protection: Protecting life and property to make businesses stronger and communities safer

3.13 The refreshed Strategic (Annual) Priorities for 2023-24 are:

Prevention

- We will prevent fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies
- We will focus on reducing health inequalities for our most vulnerable as a means of reducing risk and vulnerability to fires and other emergencies
- We will educate the community to reduce their risk and vulnerability to fires and other emergencies
- We will collaborate, and work in partnership with other organisations to reduce the risk and vulnerability to fires and other emergencies

Protection

- We will protect our communities by targeting high-risk buildings through, intelligence and data
- We will promote economic growth through education and engagement with businesses
- We will carry out our responsibilities under relevant legislation to consult and enforce to make people safer
- We will reduce disruption to businesses and communities of West Midlands
- We will implement learning from national, local and sector-led reviews

Response

- We will respond with the resources you need when you need them to protect what matters to you, to save life,

- reduce harm and protect homes and businesses
- We will be ready to respond in an assertive, effective and safe way to meet our vision.
- We will lead rescue operations, working with others to help make you safer.
- We are ready to respond locally, nationally and internationally.

3.14 **People**

3.14.1 The delivery of the three-year rolling Strategy is best achieved through a motivated, engaged and thriving workforce. Our internal people plan recognises that when our people feel that WMFS is a great place to work, then our communities are the beneficiaries.

For this reason, our three yearly rolling strategy and annual plan will now seek to look inwardly, with a focus on:

- **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 TFDP, staff competency and Incident Command.
- **Pride** – In our service, ensuring the appropriate focus is given to the effective use of our estate (Including completion of our HQ transformation), appliances and equipment, standards of appearance.

3.14.2 Through our People plan, WMFS will ensure a renewed and sustained focus on talent management, engagement and communication, Health, Safety & Wellbeing with an uncompromising commitment to Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE). WMFS will ensure that both physical and mental health issues are treated equally seriously and maintain a continual review of our Health & Wellbeing strategy to make improvements where they are identified.

3.14.3 Our DICE objectives and activities continue to be a key component to ensuring WMFS can achieve its three-year rolling

Strategy in the most effective and targeted way. WMFS has introduced the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Core Code of Ethics into WMFS which will serve as a platform to improve understanding and commitment to the service's core values. We continue to refine our positive action activities to maximise the opportunity of becoming a truly representative organisation.

3.14.4 WMFS's approach to Organisational Development centres around enabling our personal growth which in turn allows greater contribution to making West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier.

3.14.5 Understandably, how we engage and treat our people is a key focus for the Government and Home Office and as such 'People' is a pillar of the HMICFRS Inspection process within which we maintained an overall rating of 'good' during our most recent inspection. We have also improved across all subsections within this pillar that were previously identified 'requires improvement' during the last inspection.

Our refreshed People priorities for 2023-24 are:

3.14.6 We are committed to working together to make WMFS a great place to work for our people and for the benefit of our community, this to be achieved through:

- Recruiting, developing and championing talented people enabling diversity and embracing difference, enabling them to reach their potential.
- Enabling a positive working environment for all our staff and holding all to account for maintaining our core values
- Enabling and developing leaders at all levels
- Valuing the contribution of all of our people allowing everybody's voice to be heard.
- Ensuring our people know that their health, safety and wellbeing is important and will be prioritised by themselves and the service.
- Being uncompromising in our commitment to Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality, ensuring the Service is representative of our community and we have access to the widest talent pool.

- Creating an environment of personal growth and development which will ensure the service can continually adapt and improve.

3.15 **Digital**

- 3.15.1 Digital ways of working increasingly support WMFSs ability to operate in a flexible and agile way. Providing new, different and more efficient approaches to enabling the delivery of services to diverse local communities is a critical part to the implementation of our CRMP objectives and three-year rolling Strategy. This not only provides different ways for us to interact with our communities but also protects and increases our physical contact time with them.
- 3.15.2 Our communities and our people already benefit from innovative ways of working supported by new technologies such as the Dynamic Cover Tool, Microsoft 365 and Tymly. All these tools have provided us with more flexible approaches to working and delivering services in the ever-changing environment we operate in.
- 3.15.3 The recent introduction of the first phase of Oracle has seen us transfer a number of processes from Sandwell council into our own systems, for example Payroll. We have also been able to transform how we manage expenses and upgrade our procurement systems, creating different ways of working that will become even more streamlined and efficient through our ongoing transformation journey. One of the critical areas of value from implementing Oracle is that we now have systems that can talk more effectively to each other, making ways of working across WMFS more effective. This has been an area identified both through our previous HMICFRS inspection and our cultural review. The work done provides a foundation from which to keep building and improving our ways of working.
- 3.15.4 Whilst the ongoing use of digital and data will continue to transform our three-year rolling Strategy, WMFS is acutely aware that those who are most vulnerable may not have access to the technology required, and/or the skills to engage with it. The aspirations set out in our three-year Strategy 2022-25 seek to ensure our services can adapt to meet the needs of these communities as well as enable our communities to engage in a

way which increases their opportunity of access to our services. We continue to work with the partners working to improve digital inclusion and poverty.

Our refreshed Digital and Data priorities for 2023-24 are:

3.15.5 We will enhance and transform services to our communities, underpinning them with innovative and digital solutions, enabling the delivery of our strategy through:

- enabling our workforce to have the best most up to date information to keep them and our communities safer.
- ensuring that we are as efficient and effective as we can be as a service
- sharing data with other blue light services and our partners to ensure better outcomes for our communities.
- engaging with our diverse communities in new ways to help them remain informed and stay safe.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

4.1 The ongoing development and implementation of CRMP objectives through the Vision, Mission and Strategic Priorities set out in the three-year rolling Strategy, are designed to ensure that our communities and vulnerable groups are not disadvantaged through the delivery of WMFSs services. The risk of fire and other emergency incidents to local communities provide the foundation and evidence base to our CRMP.

4.2 Each of the CRMP objectives facilitated through the three-year rolling Strategy, will be subject to equality impact and access assessments to provide the most effective planning and provision of WMFSs services of Prevention, Protection and Response.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The recommendations in this report ensure the effective and efficient delivery of Fire and Rescue Authority Services as set out in the Fire and Rescue Services Act, Regulatory Reform Order, Emergency Order, Civil Contingencies Act and the

National Framework which incorporates the duties of these Acts, but also the requirements for governance and assurance of performance.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no direct financial implications to the approval of the recommendations in this report.

7. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There are no environmental implications.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Our Plan 2022-25
- CRMP 2021-23
- Fire Reform White Paper
- Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase One Report
- Manchester Arena Bombing Inquiry Report
- London Fire Brigade Independent Culture Review report
- Building Safety Act 2022
- [Three Year Rolling Strategy 2022-25 and Annual Plan](#)

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RICHARD STANTON
WAYNE BROWN

Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Chief Fire Officer

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**13 FEBRUARY 2023****1. STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2021-2022**

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

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT the Authority approves the current version of the Statement of Assurance 2021-22.
- 1.2 THAT the Statement of Assurance will be submitted to the Home Office once the findings of the external auditor have been finalised, and upon the final approval of the Chief Fire Officer.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 This report is submitted to seek approval for the Statement of Assurance 2021-22 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 2021-22 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 work to continuously improve our Service Delivery Model through the integration of Prevention, Protection and Response activity 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, and are available online through the Service's website and committee management system.

It should be noted that at the time of writing, the Value for Money Conclusion, and the Auditor's Annual Report on West Midlands Fire Authority 2021-22 (previously known as the Annual Audit Letter) remain outstanding. The Service expects to receive both in March and does not anticipate either to have an impact upon the content of the Statement of

Assurance or affect approval by the Fire Authority in preparation for submission to the Home Office (which will be done once all elements including these two items have been received and then, upon final approval of the Chief Fire Officer).

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 publishes and consults on its Community Safety Strategy (Community Risk Management Plan) on at least a three-yearly basis. This process of consultation is robust and is in line with the Fire Authority's own consultation strategy which is based on government guidance.

- 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**

- 4.1 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**

- 5.1 The preparation of the Statement of Assurance document is a legal requirement as part of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.
- 5.2 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**

- 6.1 The Statement of Assurance will be a web-based publication. No hard copies will be produced and as such 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 \(July 2020\).](#)
- [Firefighter fitness: addendum to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.](#)

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WAYNE BROWN
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

KAREN GOWREESUNKER
CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY

SATINDER SAHOTA
MONITORING OFFICER

Ref. AU/FA/2023/Feb/91801232

Statement of Assurance 2021/22**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 – Chair & Chief Fire Officer

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

This Statement of Assurance provides the reassurance that in 2021/22 your Fire and Rescue Service contributed to our vision of 'Making the West Midlands, Safer, Stronger and Healthier'.

During 2021/22 we continued to emerge from the devastating impact of the coronavirus pandemic, with the roll-out of vaccinations supporting the eventual lifting of restrictions. It has been a year that has continued to be one of the most challenging and transformational periods WMFS has ever faced. As we all transition to living with COVID, we have been determined to build upon the valuable learning from this challenging time, as we begin to transform many of the ways we work.

We're incredibly proud of how everyone at WMFS responded to meet the challenges of COVID 19. We prioritised the health and wellbeing of our staff, enabling them to keep delivering our core services and our staff have continued to be ready, willing, and able to provide a wide range of additional support for the most vulnerable members of our communities.

Whilst our outstanding emergency response has continued as normal throughout the pandemic, and the majority of serious incidents were attended in under five minutes, all other areas of the Service have continued to swiftly flex and adapt ways of working. Evolving government guidance and announcements meant staff had to

meet challenges head on, ensuring the most vulnerable were front and centre to every decision made. The new ways of working and innovative use of technology have enabled flexible and efficient home working and allowed for the continuation and adaptation of critical prevention and protection activities.

One of the outcomes of the pandemic has been the strengthening of existing partnerships and the many new partnerships that have been formed. These partnerships will prove vital to future collaborative projects and initiatives and 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.

We are also satisfied that during 2021/22 the business of the service has been conducted in accordance with good standards and that public money has been accurately accounted for.

As Chair of the WMFRA and Chief Fire Officer of WMFS, we can say that although we don't fully know what lies beyond the pandemic, what we can say with certainty is that WMFS will continue to put its communities front and centre to ensure we deliver our vision.

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 2021/2022 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 2021/22 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 2022
- 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, **£126.1m**. The total Provision of Services in 2021/2022 shows a deficit of **£61.777m**. Within this deficit is total expenditure of the Authority which for 2021/2022 was **£177.589m**.

The total income of the Authority in 2021/2022 was **£115.812m**. *(figures highlighted to be confirmed prior to Home Office publication).*

The Department of Levelling, Housing and Communities provided a range of financial support packages throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, totalling circa £6.8M over a period of three financial years, from March 2020. This funding covered the additional costs incurred due to the pandemic, to support the costs of services and offset other income losses.

In respect to the McCloud / Sargeant Ruling and Immediate Detriment, the Service continues to monitor and engage with developments outward of this and how prospective guidance from the Government impacts upon finance forecasts and governance arrangements.

Governance

The Authority is required to produce an “Annual Governance Statement” which is published in July each year at the same time as the “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 “The Fire and Rescue Authority (Membership) Order 2017”. It is a supervisory body that ensure 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 of fifteen elected Members who represent the seven local authorities that make up the West Midlands, the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner and two co-opted Members (one representing health and one representing business).

The seven local authorities 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
- Scrutiny Committee

You can find out more about the Fire Authority and its Members on the website, 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. As a result of the external audit work in 2020/21,

there were no significant matters arising that required the Authority to implement an action for improvement. The Auditor's Annual Report on West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority 2021-22 (previously the Annual Audit Letter) summarises the key findings for the year.

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 Audit Plan is agreed by the Committee and progress reported on a quarterly basis. The 2020/21 annual Audit Plan included the following nine areas of review: Absence Management, Accounts Receivable and Payable, Budgetary Control, Data Protection, Fixed Asset Accounts, Governance, Payroll and Risk Management. Of these, eight were rated with Substantial Assurance and one Limited Assurance.

The 2021/22 Annual Audit Plan included the following 11 areas of review:

Seven areas rated with Substantial Assurance:

- Data Protection
- Environmental Protection Targets
- Fixed Asset Accounting
- Accounts Payable
- Budgetary Control
- Accounts Receivable
- Risk Management

Three areas rated with Reasonable Assurance:

- Fire Stations – Management of Fuel
- Workforce Planning
- Governance

One further area, Payroll, remained in progress at the time of writing. (status to be confirmed prior to Home Office publication).

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.

OPERATIONAL

Community Risk Management Plan

The Service has been in the forefront of the development of a CRMP framework nationally, through its contribution and engagement with the National Fire Chief Council (NFCC) project. WMFS implements its CRMP in conjunction with its medium-term financial plan and Annual Plan which together comprise our three-rolling strategy for implementing our Service Delivery Model.

In recognition of both the changing CRMP, role of a fire and rescue service and government expectations, WMFRA approved the development of CRMP proposals in February 2021, following a review of our CRMP throughout 2020 and factoring in the outcomes of the public consultation exercise carried out in late 2020. The CRMP proposals comprise of Current Risks, Emerging Risks, Enhanced Community Risk Reduction and Digital Transformation. These proposals have been developed and formed into the following CRMP objectives:

- Dynamic Mobilising
- Automated Fire Alarms
- Risk Based Crewing / Blended Fleet

- Reducing Health inequalities
- Emerging Risks

These objectives have been developed as part of five projects and have been progressed throughout 2021/22, with the evaluation of the pilot schemes informing the development and approval of the setting of the CRMP objectives in February 2022.

- Dynamic Mobilising

Originally identified as a continuation of the 'survivability research' that the Service carried out in 2016 which provided a sound evidence base to the overall timeline for the survival of a victim of fire in the home (and other emergency incidents) and the impact that a 5-minute response time could have on risk to life. The dynamic mobilising research has been undertaken with intention 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 threat of serious harm to life and/or property.

- Automated Fire Alarms

The review of our approach to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFA) has enabled the consideration of options which will provide a risk-based approach to dynamically mobilising our people and resources to AFAs. Mobilising resources to fires/life risk incidents where the site is not managed will not change.

Alternative options to responding to sleeping risk AFAs, such as Student Accommodation, will further protect the Service Delivery Model, to ensure resources are available for immediate deployment to high-risk incidents.

- 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.

The focus of a blended fleet is 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. Critical to the future of our blended fleet is not only how it can adapt to changing approaches to the delivery of prevention, protection and response activities but also how external influencing factors such as innovation, sector research and environmental considerations will impact the type of vehicles required for the future

- Reducing Health Inequalities

Reducing Health Inequalities objective 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 is focussing on the areas of People, Digital and Data, as well as Partnerships and Collaboration, to enable a whole systems approach to the development of interventions to enable the objective to be met.

- **Emerging Risks**

The Service recognises the future impact of external and environmental changes, events which will have an impact on how we deliver our services as well as the skills required of our people to achieve this. The number and severity of incidents we attend are influenced by climate change, the threat of terrorism and big infrastructure projects, e.g., construction of the HS2 rail line. We need to be ready to respond to all foreseeable risks, which means improving our skills and resources plus partnerships with other organisations.

This has seen the introduction of a third Technical Rescue Station located at Sutton Coldfield (which went live in May 2022) which will provide our communities with enhanced capability and capacity to deal with identified emerging risks in an agile and flexible manner. This additional provision will increase levels of assurance and resilience in the delivery of our specialist response capability and National Resilience requirements including enhancing our safeguarding contribution to the 'Prevent Strategy' around extremism and terrorism.

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). Experiences during the COVID 19 Pandemic including the establishment of the Strategic Co-ordinating Group have reinforced the commitment of partners, rationalised ways of working, and increased collaboration.

The Service supports the UK-wide emergency approach as part of National Resilience and the Service has enhanced capabilities to support responding to major emergencies such as terrorist attacks, industrial and domestic accidents, and natural disasters, providing support UK wide. 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. We continue to enhance our capabilities further with the provision of the third Technical Rescue Unit at Sutton Coldfield, developed throughout 2021/22 and operational as of May 2022.

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 well-being. 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 Service has re-evaluated the focus of wellbeing and delivery by our Occupational Health Teams, with a mixture of internal and external provision. We continue to strive to provide a comprehensive package of support to all our staff, across a wide range of areas from physical to emotional wellbeing. This approach as included the recommencing of regular ‘Brave Space Talks’, a series of open debates hosted by a panel of volunteers with each session focussing on a particular topic of inclusion, providing staff the opportunity and a safe environment to talk openly within Our Values. There are three core elements that underpin much of our role as a fire service - our people, value for money and our digital approach. Staff culture, 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 priorities.

To support this approach, the Service has adopted the National Core Code of Ethics. These ethics form the foundation of Our Values, and the adoption of them has enabled the review and refresh of our approach to Ethics, Values and Behaviours. Our Values set out how we can all be the best that we can be in everything that we do. They encompass the things that are important to us as a Service. United by our values, they support us to achieve our Vision and deliver our Strategy. By working together, using the values as our guide, we can continue to create an environment that allows everyone to thrive.

Effective safeguarding is integral to the delivery of WMFS strategic objectives, specifically Prevention and Protection. Following the review of Safeguarding within the Service and the appointment of a Safeguarding Manager within the People Support Services Team who has continued to engage and work with key

stakeholders and employees, embedding a safeguarding culture based upon robust policies and procedures including the development of the Safeguarding Toolkit and the establishment of the Safeguarding Oversight and Assurance Group whose purpose is to ensure oversight of safeguarding activity in the Service and to provide assurance of its quality, outcomes, and impact.

External Operational Assurance

Our Plan forms part of the WMFS rolling three-year strategy. The operational year of 2021/2022 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 throughout the pandemic, all other areas of the Service continue to swiftly flex and adapt to new ways of working.

The Service continues to engage through NFCC working groups and partnerships. The Service was a significant contributor to the development of the Core Code of Ethics for the fire sector. The Service is pro-active in the development, consultation and implementation of the Fire Standards including the full utilisation of the implementation tools that are available. These support the planning, gap analysis, and evaluation of the level of compliance, as part of the ongoing development of the Service and the commitment to professionalism and continuous improvement. We continue to be committed to the aim and objectives of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire Rescue Services (HMICFRS), fully supporting the inspection process.

The round one inspection resulted in HMICFRS judging the performance of the Service as 'good' against all three pillars of efficiency, effectiveness, and people. We were the only Fire and Rescue Service to be judged as 'outstanding' for its response to fires and other emergencies. We are incredibly proud of this achievement, and we are committed to maintaining such a high level of performance as well as continually improving across all three pillars by building upon the findings of HMICFRS, the ongoing work developing our CRMP objectives, our people, value for money, and digital approach. During 2021/22 there has been an increased engagement with HMICFRS in preparation for the Round Two inspection of the Service which will commenced in March 2022 with the findings due to be published in January 2023.

The WMFRA governance of the Service had been amended during 2020/21 in accordance with the then emerging legislation and with due regard to the WMFRA Constitution. During the period 3 April 2020 – 7 May 2021, the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 had been applied to all WMFRA business. With meetings of the full Fire Authority recommencing as of October 2020 utilising a hybrid approach enabling a mixture of attendance in person and virtually, the Annual General Meeting in June 2021 marked a return to business as usual and the reconvening of all committees, panels and fora of the Authority.

Internal Operational Assurance

We have overhauled our policy development and monitoring structure to ensure the Service's policies, structures, systems, processes and people enable compliance and excellence in all that the Service does. It supports the Service in its aim to be a 'self-aware' 'learning organisation', embracing an evidence-based approach enabling the Service's commitment to continuous improvement.

The Business Continuity Planning Team which was established in response to the pandemic and comprises of middle managers and specialist roles which support the senior leadership team, has remained in place as a virtual group to advise on consultation exercises for organisational preparedness, examples include heatwave, fuel disruption, and supply chain disruption.

Procurement and contractual assurance have been elevated as a result of the pandemic and the start of the conflict in Ukraine.

The performance of WMFS during 2021/22

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. We have continued to deliver within our defined response times throughout 2021/22.

During 2021/22 our Fire Control handled 48,931 calls, in an average of 77 seconds per call. Our firefighters attended 26,621 incidents and they arrived at the most serious in an average of just 4 minutes 42 secs. Increases in the number of calls handled and the number of incidents attended compared to 2020/21 reflected the ceasing of Covid lockdowns and related restrictions.

People who use their smartphone to call us on 999 can now 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 9,087 times throughout 2021/22 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

The 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.

By utilising technology, we have been able to offer 'virtual' Safe and Well visits to people's homes or safety audits of tall buildings. These remote Safe and Well visits enabled us to continue to provide valuable fire safety advice to our communities whilst continuing to live within the confines of the pandemic.

A review of Safe and Well by the WMFRA Scrutiny Committee commenced in February 2022 with the purpose of exploring the effectiveness of Safe and Wells, impacts upon the number of emergency incidents WMFS attends, improvements of safety (and health) of those most vulnerable to fire within our communities, and ensuring activity is targeted based on local, regional and national data, with alignment to national frameworks. The review will be progressed throughout 2022/23 including the commissioning of surveys for both staff and members of the public to ensure engagement and to gain important insight and feedback to support the review. It is anticipated that the review will be concluded by the end of 2022, with the findings to be reported to the full Fire Authority and to be factored into the ongoing development of our prevention activities. These developments in conjunction with the pilot CRMP projects and a co-ordinated set of activities will contribute to the overall objective and delivery of reducing health inequalities within our communities, which in turn will reduce risk and vulnerability to fire and other emergency incidents.

We carried out 36,988 Safe & Well visits, delivered both face to face and remotely, in 2021/22, of which over 41% originated from partner referrals.

We have handed out 12,000 pieces of equipment such as smoke alarms, hearing impaired alarms, mailbox protectors and fire-retardant bedding. Interventions such as these contributed to a 7.7% reduction in the number of casualties.

Although 912 people were killed or seriously injured on West Midlands roads in 2021/22 this was down nearly 3.2% from 2019/20. Despite COVID, 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

The 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. Considering the pandemic, the Service has utilised technology to facilitate virtual audits where applicable, to complement the existing approach to visit sites. In 2021/22 we carried out 8,510 Safe and Strong visits providing advice to businesses regarding fire prevention and protecting staff, buildings and contents.

In 2021/22 we recorded 391 accidental fires in non-domestic properties.

We have three vehicles and a team dedicated to bringing down the number of 'unwanted fire signals' from automatic fire alarms.

We attended 5,927 false alarms caused by fire alarm systems.

The Service continues to deliver against the outcomes of the Grenfell Inquiry and conducting the necessary assurance work against any findings. Examples include the development of digital solutions to support the recording and sharing of Fire Survival Guidance information at Tall Building incidents between Fire Control and the Incident Ground, extending our collaborative working with external partner agencies to utilise CCTV camera networks to provide a live feed of incidents as they evolve, and implementing the greater governance of policy and training materials that are available for staff.

Operational crews and Fire Safety Officers worked together to visit and review high rise residential buildings across the West Midlands, enabling the Service to support the Building Risk Review programme. Work progressing the Building Risk Review has continued including the establishment and digitisation of a repository of Site-Specific Risk Information (SSRI). Our approach to SSRI for Tall Buildings has been reviewed, with a gap analysis undertaken, the outcomes of which have led to the commissioning of the Tall Buildings Review whereby all such types of premises are being revisited and SSRI updated. This is being done using a collaborative approach to the Prevention, Protection and Response aspects to SSRI on Tall Buildings, ensuring that the people who are at risk are placed at the centre of the activity, with teams working closely with these respective departments to ensure the needs of the vulnerable members of our community are considered during visits to sites. In addition to ensuring the provision of up to date and comprehensive SSRI, the Operational Procedure Guidance (OPG) Fires in Tall Buildings was launched in August 2021 reflecting the review of the existing policy framework and ensuring alignment with National Operational Guidance (NOG), both being developments that will support operational crews to be assertive, effective, and safe at an incident involving a Tall Building.

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 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 2022/23

The next reporting year will feature how the Service not only continues to return to a position of business as usual and deliver within an environment of 'living with COVID' but also continues to build upon the new ways of working developed and adapted during the pandemic and since. Having been approved in February 2022, we will continue to develop and evaluate our CRMP objectives evaluated as the implementation of the pilot schemes progress throughout the year. These will continue to be an integral part of the revised three-year strategy and ongoing resource and service transformation and illustrate how the Service continues to represent a genuine commitment to embrace continuous service development to the benefit of the communities it represents and serves.

The opening of our third Technical Rescue Unit Station at Sutton Coldfield provides our communities with an enhanced capability and capacity to deal with identified emerging risks in an agile and flexible manner. This additional provision further increases levels of assurance and resilience in the delivery of WMFS specialist response capability and National Resilience requirements, and enhances our contribution to the 'Prevent Strategy' around extremism and terrorism.

Birmingham hosted the Commonwealth Games in 2022/23, and events will be taking place across the city and throughout the county of the West Midlands. WMFS was actively involved in the preparation and planning for the event, and we had a key role working with partners, to ensure the safety of everyone at the games. We were also honoured to host the United Kingdom Rescue Organisation's 'Festival of Rescue', a few weeks after the games, in Birmingham. We will work hard to ensure that both spectacles showcase the very best of what the West Midlands has to offer, whilst we continue to deliver our wide range of services that make the West Midlands safer, stronger, and healthier.

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**13 FEBRUARY 2023****1. REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION**

Report of the Clerk to the Authority

RECOMMENDED:

- 1.1. THAT Members approve the amendments to the Constitution as set out in this report and in particular Appendix 1.
- 1.2. THAT the Clerk and Monitoring Officer be authorised to make and publish any necessary consequential amendments to constitutional documents to achieve the desired changes, in consultation with Chair, Vice-Chair and CFO.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1. This report is submitted to make several changes to the WMFRA Constitution following a period of review.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. In accordance with good governance principles, WMFRA should review its Constitution on at least an annual basis. As a result, the Chair, Vice-Chair, CFO and Statutory Officers have undertaken a review of a number of areas and made recommendations for change. The changes proposed concern three main areas:
 - 3.1.1. CFO, DCFO and ACFO appointments – clarifying the appointments process including the role of the Appointments, Standards and Appeals Committee.
 - 3.1.2. Decision making – clarifying the basis on which members make decisions and adding additional clarity regarding what constitutes a strategic decision which only the Authority can

make.

- 3.1.3. Named substitutes – allowing any appropriately trained authority member to substitute in the event of absence if required.
- 3.2. Members should note that further changes will be proposed to the Constitution to reduce its overall length, remove duplication, improve readability and formatting and ease navigation. Such changes will be brought to the Authority for approval as required at the June 2023 AGM meeting.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 4.1. No initial equality impact assessment has been undertaken as these changes will have no impact on protected characteristics.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1. The Monitoring Officer has reviewed all proposed changes and does not believe there to be any additional legal implications for members.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. There are no anticipated financial implications from these changes.

7. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. An Environmental Impact Assessment has not been undertaken as there are not believed to be any environmental implications from these changes.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority Constitution – June 2021](#)

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

Wayne Brown
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

Appendix 1 – Proposed Constitutional Changes

Please note, only the relevant pages of the Constitution – where changes have been made – have been included.

Page 11 – Summary and Explanation

How Decisions are Made

The Authority has ultimate responsibility for decision making but has delegated many decisions to committees and officers as described in Article 4 and Part 3 of this Constitution.

The Authority aims to ensure decision making is efficient, transparent and accountable and in accordance with the following principles:-

- the action taken is proportionate to the desired outcome;
- decisions are taken on the basis of due with consultation and professional advice from officers;
- ~~decisions taken by e~~lected members will receive ~~I be based on~~ information provided in a written report prepared by the responsible officer(s) to support decision making;
- —
- respect for human rights;
- a presumption in favour of openness;

Reports will only be considered in private where they contain confidential or exempt information as defined under specific legislative provisions (see Part 4 Access to Information Rules – Rules 10 and 11)

Page 13 – Summary and Explanation

1.3 Monitoring

The Authority will monitor and review the operation and content of this Constitution, in consultation with officers and the Clerk and Monitoring Officer at least once per annum and, consequential upon any review, will make any changes deemed appropriate. However, the Monitoring Officer or Clerk may make such purely administrative changes (e.g., formatting, spelling or updating of references) as required in consultation with the Chair and CFO without formal review by the Authority.

Page 14 – Article 4 Decision Making

2.1 Composition and Eligibility

- (i) Composition – 2.1 (i) The Authority comprises of 18 members, 15 of whom are elected councillors, two co-opted members and a further membership to be held by the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner. **Four representatives of recognised trade unions hold special observer status.** The 15 members will be elected from the seven constituent district councils comprising the West Midlands.

Page 15 – Article 4 Decision Making

2.2 Roles and Functions of Members

It is the role of the Fire Authority to make and scrutinise decisions on the basis of 'public safety, efficiency and effectiveness' in keeping the community safer, stronger and healthier. A full description of the role of the Authority is set out in Article 6.

All members are expected to:-

- (i) act corporately for the good governance of the Authority, balancing the needs of the whole community of West Midlands with their role of local representative;
- (ii) to actively represent, promote and support the work of the Authority in the provision of Fire and Rescue Services within the whole area and community of West Midlands;
- (iii) **exercise good judgement when making decisions, with full consideration of relevant information, guidance and external factors.**

Page 19– Article 4 Decision Making

2.4.7 Special Observers

In accordance with the agreed Memorandum of Understanding, three representatives from trade unions (one FBU, one FOA and one Unison) will hold special Observer status that entitles them to attend and participate in the main Authority meetings and Policy Planning Forum. This arrangement doesn't impact upon the existing rights of all members of the public to attend public meetings of the Authority. This arrangement also does not negate the effect and the processes within the organisation's Employee Relations Framework.

The Chair of any meeting of the Authority may require a special Observer or named substitute to absent themselves from any meeting of the Authority at the Chair's discretion.

Article 4 – Decision Making

4.1 Responsibility for Decision Making

Responsibility for decision making by the Authority, its committees, and officers is in accordance with Articles 4 to 12 of this constitution and the Officers' Scheme of Delegations set out in Part 3 of this constitution which together comprise the record of responsibility for decision making.

The Authority and officers have agreed the following responsibilities for decision making:

Governance decisions are those which the Authority will be asked to ~~approve~~ approve in consultation and with professional advice from Officers via Officers. These decisions will align to the role of the Authority in setting the Strategic agenda and budget for the Service.

Operational decisions are those taken by the CFO and Officers in delivering against the strategic agenda set by the Authority. These decisions are taken independently and in line with the Scheme of Accountability Delegations.

4.2 Principles of Decision Making

All decisions of the Authority will be made in accordance with the following principles:

- be within the lawful powers of the Authority;
- proportionality (i.e. the action taken is proportionate to the desired outcome);
- be aligned to the decision-making definitions set out in this article.
- ~~Decisions are taken on the basis of~~ with due consultation and professional advice from officers and statutory officers (Decision ~~makings taken~~ by members of the Authority ~~will be based~~ will be supported on by information provided in a written report prepared by the responsible officer/s) ~~Refer to section 4.4;~~
- respect for human rights;
- a presumption in favour of openness (Reports will only be considered in private where they contain exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)(see Part 4 Access to Information Rules – Rule 11);
- clarity of aims and desired outcomes (The written reports submitted to elected members will contain a clear recommendation of the professional officer for every decision they are asked to take).

Page 24 – Article 4 Decision Making

Operational Decisions are those which:

- operate within the strategic and governance framework provided by the Authority (see explanatory note)
- direct and detail 'how' the strategic priorities and outcomes are achieved to meet the priorities of the Community Risk Management plan (CRMP)
- manage resources (people, finance, fleet, assets) in the most appropriate way to achieve the priorities of the CRMP and strategic priorities, **but do not represent a significant change to the CRMP or strategic priorities such as the closure of fire stations or the permanent removal of fire appliances.**
- are aligned to the role of the Head of Paid Service and the CFO as set out in the constitution and appropriate legislation

Decisions relating to the functions listed in Article 4 will be made by the Authority and not delegated.

Page 25 – Article 4 Decision Making

4.5 Decision Making by Officers

The CFO and officers have full accountability to make decisions on all matters relating to the administration of the Authority's functions under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and any other enabling legislation. This shall include taking and implementing decisions that are:

- Defined as the role of the CFO as set out in section Article 5, section 5.2,
- Defined as 'operational decisions as set out in Article 4, **section 4.3.3** (and explanatory guide) and
- aligned to the Scheme of Delegations set out in this constitution.

~~Explanatory note on the business planning process and feedback to members of the Authority:~~

~~Operational decisions may involve the allocation of people, finance, resources to delivery the agreed Authority Strategy and Plan. These are aligned to the CFO delegations set out in Part 3, Scheme of Delegations and may determine approaches to staffing structure, recruitment, workforce planning, etc.~~

~~Article 6 of this Constitution indicates that the Authority is responsible for the approval of the 3 year rolling Strategy and Annual Plan, and the Community Risk Management Plan as provided by the CFO. The Authority will approve the key priorities set out in The Plan and where appropriate significant changes to these, which will impact on the direction of the Authority's Strategy. Any changes will always seek to support the delivery of outcomes for the community and the achievement of the vision of, 'Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier'. A 'rolling' 3 year strategy, enables local service delivery plans to focus on current business, through the Annual Plan whilst indicating the Authority's intentions for subsequent years. The Community Safety Strategy (Community Risk Management Plan) sets out how the Service will address risk in the community to achieve the outcomes agreed in The Plan.~~

Page 26 – Article 4 Decision Making

~~The Authority will approve the rolling 3 Year Strategy, objective and Annual Plan priorities for the following financial year at the February meeting of the Authority. Following Authority approval, the Chief Fire Officer will, via his/her Scheme of Delegations, ensure the appropriate and flexible allocation of resources to meet the needs of local communities and enable the delivery of The Plan, based on analysis of risk and best fit with the resources available to him/her.~~

~~In order to ensure Authority members are kept informed of the progress in delivering the strategic objectives and outcomes set out in The Plan, progress briefings will be sent to all Authority members. This briefing will be sent out in a timely manner that allows members, who require further information or clarification on matters contained within the briefing, to request that an item be placed on the agenda for the Policy Planning Forum, which provides a forum for the discussion of issues affecting the Service.~~

Page 34 – Article 6 The Authority**Explanatory notes:**

***Significant could be in this context would be described as: 'matters which may exceed officer financial approvals or may have the potential to change the approved strategic direction and/or policy of the Authority: such as the closure of fire stations or the permanent removal of fire appliances.*

Strategic Planning: As set out in this section the Authority's strategic planning process enables a multi-year approach to the delivery of the 3 year Strategy.

Page 35 - Article 6 The Authority

6.2.4 Human Resources

- i. Approval of the staffing structure and pay and conditions of service for principal and statutory officers.
- ii. Appointment of Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officers [delegated to Appointment, Standards and Appeals Committee] in line with the processes set out within Part 6 of the Standing Orders.
- iii. The appointment of the Deputy and Assistant Chief Fire Officers on the recommendation of the CFO [delegated to Appointments, Standards and Appeals Committee];
- iv-iii. The appointment of the Clerk, Monitoring Officer and Treasurer in

Page 36 - Article 6 The Authority

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority – Constitution

line with the processes set out within Part 6 of the Standing Orders.

v-iv. Discipline and dismissal of the Chief Fire Officer, Clerk, Monitoring Officer and Treasurer **in line with the processes set out within Part 6 of the Standing Orders.**

vi-v. to hear and decide upon appeals by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, and Assistant Chief Fire Officer against dismissal or other disciplinary action. [Appointments, Standards and Appeals Committee] **in line with the processes set out within Part 6 of the Standing Orders.**

vii-vi. Deciding appeals under the firefighter pension schemes and the local government superannuation regulations [Appointments, Standards and Appeals Committee].

Explanatory notes:

The recruitment process (as set out in diagram 1 below) for the roles of DCFO and ACFO's will be led by the CFO, up to the recommendation of candidates to the Appointments, Standards and Appointments Committee and appointment. This will enable a suitable appointment to be made by the Committee based on the professional and technical competence and behavioural attributes of any candidate.

The appropriateness of any candidate recommended to the Appointments, Standards and Appointments Committee by the CFO will also be considered against the behavioural framework identifying best 'team fit' as an important aspect of the selection and appointment processes.

The Appointments, Standards and Appointments Committee will lead the final stages of the recruitment process to ensure the most appropriate candidate is appointed into role. This will be undertaken in two stages: an informal meeting with candidates to allow Members to get to know the candidate and then the formal interview process of the Appointments, Standards and Appointments Committee. This will be supported by the CFO and the HR Manager.

Where only one candidate can be recommended by the CFO to the Appointments, Standards and Appointments Committee, a decision will be taken in consultation with the CFO and the Authority's HR Manager, as to whether the recruitment process can continue or should be run again.

The CFO will lead the presentation of appointable candidate(s) who meet the professional and technical competencies as well as team fit for the role to the Appointments, Standards and Appointments Committee. The Appointments, Standards and Appointments Committee will make the decision of final appointment with due regard to the CFO recommendation.

Page 39 – Collaboration and Transformation Committee Terms of Reference

8.1 The Authority has established and Collaboration and Transformation Committee of 7 members.

8.2 Role and Functions:-

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' (Policing and Crime Act 2017) and/or the delivery of the Authority' Strategy, The Plan.

8.3 To review the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of strategic collaboration work between the service and regional partners.

8.4 To receive updates on digital innovations and strategic collaborations with other organisations.

8.5 Findings and recommendations of the Collaboration and Transformation Committee are to be submitted to the Authority by the Chair of the Governance Collaboration and Transformation Committee.

8.6 To submit its minutes to the Authority.

Page 40 – Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference

9.2 Role and Functions:-

To carry out a maximum of two scrutiny reviews selected by the Committee, with appropriate consideration of committee and officer capacity and cost per annum. Such reviews will be member-led and evidence based, and will produce SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely) recommendations to the Authority.

Page 49 – JCP Terms of Reference

The quorum of the Panel shall be one third of the total number of representatives appointed by each side subject to each Trade Union/ Representative Body being represented, however, where the Panel is considering business relating specifically to one Trade Union/ Representative Body that has locally appointed representatives, being represented, however, where the Panel is considering business relating to one Trade Union/Representative Body the quorum of the employees' side shall be one third of the total number of representatives appointed by each side, with no requirement for each Trade Union/ Representative Body to be represented, provided that the relevant Trade Union/ Representative Body must be represented.

Page 57 – Article 15

15.2 Changes to the Constitution

Changes to the constitution will only be approved by the Authority after consideration of proposals submitted by the Clerk and Monitoring Officer and following consultation with Fire Service Officers. However, the Monitoring Officer or Clerk may make such purely administrative changes (e.g., formatting, spelling or updating of references) as required in consultation with the Chair and CFO without formal review by the Authority

Page 85 – Standing Orders Part 3 Committees

- (4) (5) Should the named substitute be unable to attend, a member of the same political party can be appointed by the Chairleader of the relevant party, subject to that member having had relevant training for the Committee/Panel in question.

Page 99 – Standing Orders Part 4 Conduct of Meetings

- (4) Special Observers are entitled to contribute to Authority and PPF meetings only in line with the agreed Memorandum of Understanding.

27. Appointment, Dismissal and Disciplinary Action

- (1) The appointment of the Chief Fire Officer, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer shall be made by the Appointments function of the Appointments, Standards and Appeals Committee of the Authority. These posts shall be subject to the National Joint Council's scheme of conditions of service for Brigade Managers of Local Authorities Fire and Rescue Services as amended from time to time and be subject to the relevant disciplinary regulations which apply to the employee(s) concerned.
- (2) Where the Authority proposes to appoint a **Chief Fire Officer, as described in (1) above**, the Authority :-
 - (a) will draw up a statement specifying:
 - (i) the duties of the **officer concerned Chief Fire Officer**; and
 - (ii) any qualifications or qualities to be sought in the person to be appointed;
 - (b) will make arrangements for the post to be advertised in such a way as is likely to bring it to the attention of persons who are qualified to apply for it;
 - (c) will make arrangements for a copy of the statement mentioned in paragraph (a) to be sent to all applicants for any particular post and to any other person on request.

Once applications have been received, the Chief Fire Officer (or appropriately qualified external advisor in the absence of a CFO) will undertake a process of evaluation to determine technical, behavioural and operational competency and qualification for the role. This will include relevant behavioural and psychometric assessments and professional conversations. The CFO (or external advisor) will provide updates on this process to the Authority as required.

Following this process, the Authority, with the support of the Chief Fire Officer (or appropriate external advisor) and a People Support Services representative, will either interview all qualified applicants for the post or select a short list of qualified applicants and interview those on the short list. This interview process will take place in accordance with all applicable service recruitment policies. If no qualified person applies, the Authority shall make arrangements for further advertisement in accordance with (b)

Page 102 – Standing Orders Part 6 Cont.

(3) Where the Authority proposes to appoint a Deputy or Assistant Chief Fire Officer, the Chief Fire Officer:

(a) will draw up a statement specifying:

(i) the duties of the officer concerned; and

(ii) any qualifications or qualities to be sought in the person to be appointed;

(b) will make arrangements for the post to be advertised in such a way as is likely to bring it to the attention of persons who are qualified to apply for it;

(c) will make arrangements for a copy of the statement mentioned in paragraph (a) to be sent to all applicants for any particular post and to any other person on request.

Once applications have been received, the Chief Fire Officer will undertake a process of evaluation to determine technical, behavioural and operational competency and qualification for the role. This will include relevant behavioural and psychometric assessments and professional conversations. The CFO will provide updates on this process to the Authority as required. The CFO will then select a shortlist of the suitably qualified candidates for interview by the Appointments Committee.

Following this process, the Authority, with the support of the Chief Fire Officer and a People Support Services representative, will interview all shortlisted applicants. This interview process will take place in accordance with all applicable service recruitment policies. If no qualified person applies, or the Authority does not believe there to be sufficient qualified candidates for interview, the Chief Fire Officer shall make arrangements for further advertisement in accordance with (b) above.

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

13 FEBRUARY 2023

1. **DISCRETIONS POLICY – 2015 FIREFIGHTERS’ AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEMES**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT the Authority approves the changes to the Discretions Policy for the 2015 Firefighters’ and Local Government Pension Schemes.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 2.1 To request approval for changes to the Discretions Policy for the 2015 Firefighters’ and Local Government Pension Schemes.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Under the rules of the 2015 Firefighters’ and Local Government Pension Schemes, the Authority has a requirement to publish and maintain a policy on their use of various discretions available to them under the Scheme rules. This is done annually as part of the Authority’s pay policy statement.
- 3.2 As part of their recent decision in a case, brought against Warwickshire FRS, the Pensions Ombudsman has indicated that policies must not make a simple blanket statement about how specific discretions will be applied.
- 3.3 West Midlands Fire Service has several such specific discretions currently in place. This report highlights the affected discretions and recommends appropriate replacements.
- 3.4 In addition to bringing these discretions in line with current guidance, the opportunity to update several other discretions has also been taken.
- 3.5 The updated discretions and the changed wording being proposed are attached at Appendices 1 and 2.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 4.1 In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and no employees will be adversely impacted by this change in policy.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There is a statutory requirement for West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority to comply with the rules of the 2015 Firefighters and Local Government Pension Schemes.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The Discretions policy does not result in any additional costs being incurred by the Authority.

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Pay Policy Statement Report 2022/2023 – Fire Authority 27th June 2022

The Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013
2015 Firefighters' Pension Scheme Regulations

The contact name for this report is Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Enabling Services) Karen Gowreesunker - telephone number 0121 380 6914.

WAYNE BROWN
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

Under Regulation 7 of the Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006, operative from 29 November 2006, each employer must formulate, keep under review and publish their policies on certain discretions contained within the Regulations.

This statement is applicable to all employees of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority who are eligible to be members of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

Regulation 5 - Power to increase statutory redundancy payments

Explanation

Employers have the discretion to resolve to use the employee's actual pay instead of the statutory maximum pay permitted under the Employments Rights Act 1996, in the calculation of redundancy payments.

Policy

~~The Fire Authority will always use the employees' actual pay when calculating redundancy payments.~~

The Chief Fire Officer or his/her nominated Officer will confirm on a case-by-case basis if actual or statutory maximum pay are to be used.

Regulation 6 – Discretionary Compensation

Explanation

The Authority has the discretion to resolve to increase the lump sum compensation payable under the Employments Rights Act 1996 to an employee who loses their employment with the Authority, up to a maximum of 104 weeks' pay.

Policy

~~The Fire Authority will not exercise this discretion and therefore will not increase the maximum payable beyond the statutory limit of 30 weeks' pay.~~

On a case-by-case basis the Chief Fire Officer or his/her nominated Officer will confirm whether the maximum payable is to be increased and if so by how many weeks.

STATEMENT OF POLICY

1 April 2014

Under Regulation 60 (1) of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) Regulations 2013, each employer must formulate, keep under review and publish their policies on certain discretions contained within the LGPS Regulations.

This statement is applicable to all employees of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority who are eligible to be members of the LGPS.

1. Regulation 30 (8) – Waiving of actuarial reduction

Explanation

From age 55, members who have left local government employment receive early payment of their retirement benefits and do not need their employer's consent. The pension benefits must be reduced in accordance with guidance provided by the Government actuary. Employers may determine on compassionate grounds that the benefits are not reduced.

For a member who joined the scheme prior to 1 October 2006 where the member's age and membership (in whole years) satisfies the "rule of 85" then the benefits would be reduced, unless the employer chooses to exercise the discretion within the regulations. For a member who joined the Scheme on or after 1 October 2006, then reduced benefits would be payable if taken before age 65.

Policy

Each specific case will be judged equally and fairly on its own merits and would need to be funded by a lump sum contribution into the Pensions Fund by the Fire Authority. This discretion will only be exercised by the Fire Authority in cases where it can be demonstrated that the Fire Authority can fund the cost of the release within a three year period.

This discretion will be exercised by the Strategic Enabler (People Support Services) as delegated by Chief Fire Officer in conjunction with the Treasurer and Chairman to approve existing severance packages and members will be notified where discretion is exercised.

2. **Regulation 31 - Power of the Employing Authority to award Additional Pension**

Explanation

An employer may resolve to award a member additional pension of not more than £6,500 a year, payable from the same date as their pension is payable under any other provision of these regulations. An additional pension may be paid in addition to any increase to total membership resolved under Regulation 16 so long as the overall total does not breach the limits laid down within these regulations.

Policy

Each specific case will be judged equally and fairly on its own merits, having fully considered service delivery and financial costs.

3. **Regulation 30 (6) - Flexible Retirement**

Explanation

A member who is aged 55 or over and with their employer's consent reduces their hours or grade can then, but only with the agreement of the employer, make an election to the administering authority for payment of their accrued benefits without having retired from that employment.

Policy

Each specific case will be judged equally and fairly on its own merits having fully considered service delivery and financial costs. This discretion will only be exercised by the Fire Authority in cases where it can be demonstrated that the Fire Authority can fund the cost of the release within a three-year period.

4. **Regulations 16(2)(e) and 16(4)(d) - Funding of Additional Pension**

Explanation

Where an active member opts to make Additional Pension Contributions (APC) under Rule 16(2)(e) these may be funded in whole or in part by the Employer. Under Rule 16(4)(d) the employee may opt to pay APC as a Lump Sum and this may also be funded in full or part by the employer.

Policy

The Fire Authority will fund in whole or in part any APC operated by themselves under a salary sacrifice arrangement.

The Fire Authority will, however, not fund in whole or in part any other APC purchased either by periodical payments or Lump Sum direct from a members Net Pay.

The Fire Authority is not obliged by the Regulations to publish a statement on the following discretions contained within the LGPS 2013 Regulations but has chosen to do so.

5. **Regulation 22(8)(b) - Re-employed and Rejoining Deferred Members**

Explanation

Where a deferred member becomes an active member again before becoming entitled to the immediate payment of retirement benefits in respect of their former membership, their former membership will be aggregated with their current active membership unless within 12 months from the date of the active member's pension account being opened they make an election in writing to the member's appropriate administering authority. The period of 12 months may be extended at the discretion of the employing authority.

Policy

The Fire Authority will extend the period of 12 months beginning with the date that the active member's pension account is opened again to allow a member to choose not to aggregate his/her former membership in exceptional circumstances or where it was beyond the member's control.

6. Regulation 100 (6) – Inward Transfer of Pension Rights

Explanation

A person who becomes an active member who has relevant pension rights may request his fund authority to accept a transfer value for some, or all, of his former rights. An election must be made in writing before the expiry of the period of 12 months beginning with the date that he became an active member or any such longer period as his employer may allow.

Policy

The Fire Authority will extend the period of 12 months beginning with the date that he/she became an active member – thereby, allowing a member to transfer some or all of his/her rights from the relevant transferor in exceptional circumstances or in circumstances beyond the member's control.

7. Choice of early payment of Deferred Pension

Explanation

Where a member became a deferred member between 31 March 2008 and 1 April 2014, they can apply for early release of benefits, and the Fire Authority can fund the costs of the release.

Policy

Each specific case will be judged equally and fairly on its own merits and would need to be funded by a lump sum contribution into the Pensions Fund by the Fire Authority. This discretion will only be exercised by the Fire Authority in cases where it can be demonstrated that the Fire Authority can fund the cost of the release within a three year period.

This discretion will be exercised by the Strategic Enabler (People Support Services) as delegated by Chief Fire Officer in conjunction with the Treasurer and Chairman to approve existing severance packages and members will be notified where discretion is exercised.

From 1 June 2004, an amended Internal disputes resolution procedure applies to active members of the LGPS and to others such as deferred and pensioner members, whose position may be affected by decisions taken by their former employer or LGPS administering authority.

8. The Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure

Explanation

Responsibility for determinations under the first stage of the procedure now rests with a 'specified person' appointed by your (former) employer. The Fire Authority must specify the job title and address of the person to whom applications should be directed.

Policy

The specified person for the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority is:-

~~Mr P Hales~~
~~Deputy Chief Fire Officer~~
Chief Fire Officer
West Midlands Fire Service HQ
99 Vauxhall Road
Birmingham, B7 4HW

Under Rule B7 of the 1992 Firefighters' Pension Scheme Paragraph 5 (A) a fire and rescue authority may, having regard to—

- (a) the economical, effective and efficient management of their functions, and
- (b) the costs likely to be incurred in the particular case

- pay a lump sum in excess of two and a quarter times the full amount of the pension.

West Midlands Fire Service will formulate, keep under review and publish their policy on the discretion contained within this rule.

Due to the rate of the commutation factors laid down within the 1992 Firefighters' Pension Scheme it is possible for an unauthorised payment to occur if a member commutes the maximum allowable portion of their gross pension. In cases where this happens the Fire Authority will become liable to a further charge. When using this discretion, the amount to which the lump sum will be increased will be limited to the maximum authorised payment allowed by HMRC regulations.

This statement is applicable to all employees of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority who are eligible to be members of the 1992 Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

Policy

Each specific case will be judged equally and fairly on its own merits and would need to be funded by a lump sum contribution into the Pensions Fund by the Fire Authority. It is the Line Manager's responsibility to ensure that the recommendation is made and submitted to their SET managers for consideration. The value of the Lump Sum payment into the Pension account will be provided by the Pensions section on request and the remaining cost figures should be obtained from the Finance Liaison Officer.

This discretion will only be exercised by the Fire Authority in cases where it can be demonstrated that the Fire Authority can fund the cost of the release within a 3-year period.

This discretion will be exercised by the Strategic Enabler of People Support Services and Strategic Enabler of Finance & Resources.

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Under Rule K4 of the 1992 Firefighters' Pension Scheme:

A fire and rescue authority may, in their discretion, withdraw the whole or any part of the pension, except a pension under Part C (awards on death—spouses and civil partners), for any period during which the person entitled to it is employed by any fire and rescue authority in whatever capacity.

Part LA Section 9 of the scheme rules states that:

Where an authority exercises its discretion not to withdraw the payment in whole or in part of any pension under rule K4 (withdrawal of pension whilst employed by a fire and rescue authority), the authority shall in the financial year in which payment is not withdrawn, transfer into the Firefighters' Pension Fund an amount equal to the amount of pension paid during that financial year to that person which could have been abated or withdrawn.

West Midlands Fire Service will formulate, keep under review and publish their policy on the discretion contained within this rule.

This statement is applicable to all employees of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority who are eligible to be members of the 1992 Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

Policy

West Midlands Fire Service will **on a case-by-case basis consider whether it is appropriate to** withdraw the whole or part of the pension, except a pension under Part C (awards on death—spouses and civil partners), for any period during which the person entitled to it is employed by any fire and rescue authority in whatever capacity.

The decision on whether to withdraw part or all of the pension will be made by the Chief Fire Officer or his/her nominated Officer.

Where it is considered appropriate the amount of Pension withdrawn will be calculated by reference to the Aggregate Annual Pensionable Pay received in the twelve months prior to retirement increased on the same basis as the pension in payment. This figure will be known as the reference pay and will be increased annually in line with the annual pension increase order.

The pension will be reduced by an amount equal to the amount required so

that the total income from the pension plus re-employment does not exceed the reference pay calculated above.

Pay in re-employment is the pay receivable under the contract of employment for the hours worked and excludes any payments made for non-contractual overtime. Where the pay in re-employment changes the amount of pension to be withdrawn will be recalculated.

23. Contributions during absence from work due to illness, injury, trade dispute or authorised absence (Regulation 111)

Where an active member is absent from scheme employment because of illness or injury and not entitled to receive pensionable pay, or because of trade dispute or authorised unpaid absence, they may pay member contributions; if they do, the scheme employer may require that they should also pay employer contributions. [Regulation 111(2), (3) and (4)]

Statement of Policy

Where an active member is absent from scheme employment because of illness or injury and not entitled to receive pensionable pay, or because of trade dispute or authorised unpaid absence, they will be allowed to pay contributions. The contribution payable will **normally** be the total of both the member and employer contribution.

In cases where the payment of both member and employer contributions may cause undue financial hardship, a member will have the right to request that payment of the employer contributions be waived. Any such request will be considered by the Chief Fire Officer or his/her nominated Officer.

24. Deduction and payment of contributions (Regulation 114)

Member contributions due under Regulation 110 may be deducted by the scheme employer from each instalment of pensionable pay as it becomes due, unless another method of payment has been agreed between the scheme manager and the member. [Regulation 114(1)]

Contributions due in respect of absence from work on reserve forces service leave may be deducted from any payment made under Part 5 of the Reserve and Auxiliary Forces (Protection of Civil Interests) Act 1951. [Regulations 114(2)]

Contributions which the member is required to pay, or has elected to pay under Regulations 111 and 113, may be paid by a lump sum or by deduction from instalments of pensionable pay as agreed between the member and

the scheme manager. [Regulation 114(3)]

Statement of Policy

Member contributions due under Regulation 110 will be deducted from each instalment of pensionable pay as it becomes due.

Contributions due in respect of absence from work on reserve forces service leave will be deducted from any payment made under Part 5 of the Reserve and Auxiliary Forces (Protection of Civil Interests) Act 1951.

Contributions which the member is required to pay, or has elected to pay under Regulations 111 and 113, may be paid by a lump sum or by deduction from instalments of pensionable pay as agreed between the member and Payroll and Pensions Manager on behalf of the scheme manager.

49. Member's Election to make periodical contributions for added pension (Schedule 1, Part 1, Paragraph 7)

If a scheme member wishes to make periodical payments for added pension, the scheme manager can set a minimum amount which must be paid. [Schedule 1, Part 1, Paragraph 7(3)]

Statement of Policy

The scheme manager will not consider on a case-by-case basis whether to allow a member to make periodic payments for added pension of less than £10 per month.

50. Periodical payments (Schedule 1, Part 2, Paragraph 8)

If a scheme member wants to make periodical payments for added pension, but does not want them to be deducted from pensionable pay, the scheme manager may agree another method of payment. [Schedule 1 Part 2, Paragraph 8 (3)]

Statement of Policy

The scheme manager will not consider on a case-by-case basis whether to allow a member to make periodical payments for added pension except by deduction from pensionable pay.

The following discretion is removed from the policy as it is no longer applicable.

52. ~~Meaning of "tapered protection closing date" (Schedule 2, Part 1, Paragraph 3)~~

~~The tapered protection closing dates for tapered protection members are given in the 1992 scheme tables in Schedule 2 Part 4. In most cases the appropriate closing date can be ascertained by reference to the band of dates in which the firefighter's birthday falls. The tapered protection date for a tapered protection member of FPS 2006 to whom paragraph 9(5) or 21 applies (members returning to pensionable service) is determined by the scheme manager. [Schedule 2 Part 1,~~

~~Paragraph 3(3); Schedule 2 Part 2, Paragraph 9(5); and Schedule 2 Part 3, Paragraph 21]~~

Statement of Policy

~~The tapered protection date for a tapered protection member of FPS 2006 to whom paragraph 9(5) or 21 applies (members returning to pensionable service) is determined by the scheme manager. This determination will be exercised by the Payroll and Pensions Manager.~~

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**13 FEBRUARY 2023****1. MONITORING OF FINANCES**

Report of the Treasurer.

RECOMMENDED

1.1 THAT the report be noted.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 This report deals with the monitoring of the finances of the Authority in the current financial year and covers revenue expenditure and the Capital Programme.

2.2 Expenditure is compared with a profile of the Authority's budget.

3. BACKGROUND**3.1 Revenue Expenditure**

3.1.1 The Authority's 2022/2023 Council Tax requirement is £49.405 million and the revenue budget is £108.303 million.

3.1.2 Appendix A compares the revenue budgeted to the end of December 2022 with the actuals to that date. Devolved budgets are managed by the Section responsible for incurring the expenditure as opposed to corporate budgets, which are managed by the named Section on behalf of the Brigade as a whole.

3.1.3 Actual spend to December 2022, including commitments, was £81.455 million compared to a projected budget of £81.284 million, an overall adverse variance of £0.171 million.

3.1.4 The overall adverse variance is mainly due to an overspend on Operational pay budgets.

3.1.5 In addition, it is recognised there will be revenue budget pressures arising from pay awards in the current year. This matter was considered at the Fire Authority meeting on 10 October 2022. The pay award budget pressure in the current year (i.e. anything above the 2% budget assumption) is to be funded by reserves.

3.1.6 Appendix B provides statistical data relating to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

3.2 **Capital Expenditure**

3.2.1 The Authority's approved capital programme for 2022/2023 is £6.588 million. A scheme analysis is shown on Appendix C. Expenditure to the end of December 2022 is shown as £2.297 million.

3.2.2 The main forecast variances within the capital programme relate to:

- Vehicle Replacement Programme slippage:
 - 3 * Brigade Response Vehicles
 - 4 * Welfare Vans
 - 3 * Electric Vans (Stores)
 - 3 * Water Support Units
 - 2 * Trailers
- Alternative approach to Transport Engineering Workshops re-roofing and savings from the tendering exercise.
- The deferral of window/door replacements to 2023/24.
- The deferral of an additional burn room and welfare facility at Coventry Fire Station along with several other drill tower refurbishments.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

4.1 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 do not relate to a policy change.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 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.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 These are contained in the body of the report and the attached Appendices.

7. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no financial implications.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Authority's Budget and Precept Report – February 2022
- Pay Award Update and Associated Budgetary Pressures – October 2022
- Finance Office Budget Monitoring Files

The contact officer for this report is Karen Gowreesunker, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, telephone number 0121 380 6906.

MIKE GRIFFITHS
TREASURER

REVENUE MONITORING SUMMARY TO DECEMBER 2022

	BUDGET 2022/2023 £'000	PROFILED BUDGET £'000	ACTUALS + COMMIT -MENTS £'000	VARIANCE TO PROFILED BUDGET £'000
DEVOLVED BUDGETS				
Corporate Management	1,101	833	833	0
Corporate Charges	2	1	1	0
Portfolio & Organisational Intelligence	1,753	1,324	1,340	16
Operations	3,487	2,059	1,955	-104
Fire Control & Business Continuity	1,700	1,206	1,167	-39
Prevention	2,240	1,540	1,513	-27
Protection	5,058	3,814	3,779	-35
Response, Policy & Organisational Assurance	1,738	1,272	1,271	-1
Resourcing	6,822	5,091	5,111	20
Digital & Data	7,738	6,512	6,502	-10
Communications & Engagement	1,039	729	729	0
People Support Services	627	464	459	-5
Employee Relations	195	152	152	0
Organisational Development	62	47	47	0
Organisational Learning & People Development	4,425	3,286	3,285	-1
Health, Safety & Wellbeing	2,836	2,182	2,189	7
CORPORATE BUDGETS				
Prevention	24	18	17	-1
Protection	9	-42	-30	12
Response, Policy & Organisational Assurance	-109	92	95	3
Resourcing	16,715	10,453	10,406	-47
Digital & Data	132	98	98	0
People Support Services	2,396	1,795	1,794	-1
Employee Relations	110	106	119	13
Organisational Learning & People Development	125	93	83	-10
Health, Safety & Wellbeing	49,557	37,156	37,527	371
Other Income & Expenditure	1,029	1,003	1,013	10

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Appropriation to (from) Reserves	(2,508)	-	-	-
TOTAL (NET BUDGET REQUIREMENT)	108,303	81,284	81,455	171
Core Funding	-58,898	-42,266	-42,266	0
TOTAL (COUNCIL TAX REQUIREMENT)	49,405	39,018	39,189	171

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FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION SCHEMES

NON-FINANCIAL INFORMATION	2022/23 PROJECTION				ACTUAL POSITION AS AT DECEMBER 2022			
	1992 FPS	2006 FPS	2015 FPS	TOTAL	1992 FPS	2006 FPS	2015 FPS	TOTAL
Members of FPS at 1st April 2022	-	-	1,243	1,243	-	-	1,243	1,243
New Members	-	-	70	70	-	-	23	23
Opt-In (including net auto-enrolment)	-	-	12	12	-	-	48	48
Transitional Members during year	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Transfers from Other Pension Schemes	-	-	5	5	-	-	-	-
Transfers to Other Pension Schemes	-	-	-2	-2	-	-	-	-
Retirements	-	-	-55	-55	-	-	-49	-49
Opt-Out	-	-	-12	-12	-	-	-27	-27
Leavers	-	-	-12	-12	-	-	-1	-1
Ill-Health Retirements	-	-	-3	-3	-	-	-2	-2
Members of the Fire Pension Schemes as at 31st December 2022	-	-			-	-	1,235	1,235

CAPITAL MONITORING STATEMENT 2022/23

Scheme	Year 2022/23	Latest Budget £'000	Actuals December 2022 £'000	Forecast £'000	Variance £'000
<u>LAND & BUILDINGS</u>					
Boiler Replacement Programme	Ongoing	15	-	-	-15
Roof Replacements	Ongoing	1,091	181	372	-719
Windows/Door Replacement	Ongoing	683	16	16	-667
Rewires	Ongoing	175	-	105	-70
Drill Tower and Burn Facility	5 of 5	635	74	195	-440
Other Building Modifications	3 of 3	11	10	10	-1
Security Works	4 of 4	47	-	15	-32
HQ Alterations	2 of 2	109	35	65	-44
OHW Works	4 of 4	17	7	12	-5
Aston Fire Station	8 of 8	61	56	61	-
<u>VEHICLES</u>					
Vehicle Replacement Programme	Ongoing	3,595	1,887	2,418	-1,177
<u>ICT & EQUIPMENT</u>					
C&C Upgrade-Vision 4/ESMCP	5 of 5	149	31	149	-
Grand Total		6,588	2,297	3,418	-3,170
<u>Funded By</u>					
Prudential Borrowing		0		0	-
Capital Grants/Contributions		74		74	-
Capital Receipts to be Applied		0		0	-
Revenue Financing/Earmarked Reserves		6,514		3,344	-3,170
TOTAL		6,588		3,418	-3,170
SURPLUS(-)/DEFICIT(+)					

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY ^{Item 14}

13 FEBURARY 2023

1. **CONTRACT AWARDS SUMMARY FOR PERIOD TO
31 JANUARY 2023**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT the Authority note the attached Appendix which summarises the contracts in excess of £250,000 that have been awarded since June 2022.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 2.1 This report provides a six-month summary of all contracts that have been awarded since the last report submitted in June 2022.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 As part of the Authority's Constitution, it is required that a retrospective, twice yearly summary report of tender contract awards in excess of £250,000 be submitted to the Fire Authority for information purposes.
- 3.2 In accordance with the above requirement, a summary of those contracts awarded is attached as Appendix 1.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The procurement processes that were followed for the procurement exercises detailed in the Appendices to this report were conducted in accordance with the Authority's Procurement Standing Orders and

the Public Contract Regulations 2015.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 These are contained in the attached Appendices.

7. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Policy 1/8 – Procurement Procedures

The contact name for this report is Chief Fire Officer Wayne Brown -
Telephone Number - 0121 380 6907.

WAYNE BROWN
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

APPENDIX 1

Contract Title	Winning Supplier	Approval Date	Contract Period (Including Extension Options)	Annual Contract value or Total Value for one off Purchase	Total Contract Value (including extension periods)	Budget PA	Basis of award e.g. Lowest Price or MEAT	Date and Minute Number of Planned Tender Report	Any Other Relevant Information
Enterprise Resource Planning System (Time and Attendance System)	Kronus Systems Ltd	19 January 2023	3 years	£270,000 implementation costs plus £150,00 pa	£720,000	£150,000	*Direct call off from framework agreement **Direct Award	18 February 2019	*Time & Attendance system £550,000 **Rostering System £170,000
End of Life Vehicles	Autobits Scrap Metal Ltd	11 July 2022	Two years with option for further two years	£65,000	£260,000	£65,000	MEAT	14 February 2022	
Frontline Devices	CCS Media Ltd	12 September 2022	One off purchase	£270,000	£270,000	£270,000	Direct Award Via Framework Agreement	14 February 2022	
Oracle Support	Namos Solutions Ltd	26 October 2022	One year plus option for a second year	£100,000	£200,000	£200,000	Direct award from Framework Agreement	10 October 2022	
Oracle Phase 2 work	Namos Solutions Ltd	1 November 2022	1 year	£292,500	£292,500	Purchase Orders raised on phased basis	Direct award from Framework Agreement	10 October 2022	
National Framework Agreement for Gas Monitors	Crowcon Detection Instruments Ltd Drager Safety UK Ltd MSA (Britain) Ltd Life Safety Distributions GmbH	10 November 2022	4 years	*£1,125,000	*£4,500,000	*£70,000	MEAT	14 February 2022	"The Framework value is £4.5m. The authority has a budget of £70k in 2023/24 to replace gas monitors

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	Sunbelt Rentals Ltd								
Rental of Airwaves Equipment	Airwave Solutions Ltd	13 December 2022	4 years	£70,000	£280,000	£70,000	Direct award from Framework Agreement	12 December 2022	

MEAT = Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT)

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WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

13 FEBRUARY 2023

1. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS PUBLIC COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT the minutes of the following minutes of previous public Committee meetings, attached as appendices to this report, be noted:

- Scrutiny Committee - Monday 07 November 2022
- Collaboration and Transformation Committee – Monday 05 September 2022

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is for the Authority to note the minutes of previous public Committee meetings.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The minutes of the previous Committee meetings have been approved by the relevant meeting as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 4.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

7. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Relevant Committee Agenda Packs](#)
- [West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority Constitution](#)

The contact name for this report is Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk of the Authority – telephone number 07973810338.

Wayne Brown
Chief Fire Officer

Karen Gowreesunker
Clerk of the Authority

Minutes of the Collaboration and Transformation Committee

05 September 2022

Conducted as a public meeting at Headquarters and digitally via
Microsoft Teams

Present: Councillor Dehar (Chair), Councillor Hussain (Vice-Chair),
Councillor Iqbal, Councillor Hogarth.

Virtual: Councillor Miks, Prof Simon Brake, APCC Wasim Ali

Officers: Mike Griffiths, Pete Wilson, Andrea Simmonds, Kash Singh
Tom Embury, Kirsty Tuffin.

10/22 **To receive apologies for absence (if any)**

Apologies for absence were received from the Chief Fire
Officer, Phil Loach and Councillor Ian Kettle.

11/22 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

12/22 **Minutes of the Collaboration and Transformation
Committee held on 18 July 2022**

Resolved:

1. That the Minutes of the Collaboration and Transformation
Committee held on 18 July 2022 were approved as a correct
record of proceedings.

13/22 **Fire Reform White Paper - Consultation Responses**

Tom Embury, Deputy Clerk to the Authority presented the
Fire Reform White Paper - Consultation Responses Report
that provided an overview of the local and national
responses to the Fire Reform White Paper.

The Committee were advised that following its approval at
the last Collaboration and Transformation Committee, that
took place on Monday 18 July 2022, the Authority had
submitted their response on Tuesday 26 July 2022. A

response had been submitted on behalf of the operational leadership of the service, as per appendix A of the report, and had focused upon the operational perspective.

The Local Government Association (LGA) had been a similar to that of the Authorities supporting local decision making and the NJC. The LGA had raised concerns that had not been covered within the White Paper in their response, as outlined within the report. As with the LGA, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) who represented Senior Officers, welcomed the intent of the White Paper and the importance of a Sector led Fit for the Future Project. They strongly supported the need for increased flexibility and a reform of the current pay negotiation processes.

The Committee were advised that the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) had opposed most of the proposals within the White Paper and had expressed disappointment with the proposal for increased powers to the Chief Fire Officer.

The response from Andy Street, West Midlands Mayor, had provided support for a single elected official having responsibility for the governance of the service and supported operational independence of the Chief Fire Officer. The full response had been attached as appendix B to the report.

Councillor Hogarth expressed that the majority of the responses both locally and nationally had overall agreement on the views expressed in their responses to the proposals. He acknowledged that some changes were needed but not to the scope in which the White Paper had proposed.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the Fire Reform White Paper Consultation Responses from other key stakeholders be noted.

14/22

Progress Update Reducing Health Inequalities CRMP Project

Pete Wilson, Strategic Lead – Prevention, presented the Reducing Health Inequalities Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) Project report that outlined the progress made in delivering the tasks and intended outcomes of the Reducing Health Inequalities CRMP project.

The Committee were advised that following the CRMP, reducing health inequalities had been one of six projects. The project had included several activities with a long-term approach to be taken. The four main areas of focus had been people, digital, data and partnerships and collaboration.

The Committee were advised that surveys had/would be circulated to those who have had a Safe and Well (SAW) visit to question their experience via letters and digitally. So far, the responses had been positive and indicated that the SAW had improved people's health, wellbeing, quality of life and therefore, reducing their vulnerability to fires. Some of the key data from the surveys highlighted were:

- 95% of those who smoked from the 2,278 respondents said they had a greater understanding of the risks of smoking
- Of those that smoked, 145 were referred to stop smoking services, with 60 (41%) of those referred stopped smoking.

The Committee were advised that the service had developed membership arrangements for SAW to support a collaborative approach to data sharing and two-way referrals between the service and its partners. 5 partners had signed up and would assist in identifying the most vulnerable in the community.

Following questions on the use of the new online home fire safety check, that would be available on the services website, Kash Singh, Strategic Enabler of ICT Digital and Data, advised the Committee that the website had the option to change the language via a drop-down list. The

involvement of Cllrs involvement in these projects would be hugely beneficial and provided a link into the local authority's/their chief executives. Following queries on the engagement of 3rd sector organisations, Pete Wilson advised the Committee that a vital piece of the work had been to work with groups such as religious groups and build partnerships where possible. He advised that if Members had any groups that they wished the services to make contact with them to let him know. It was agreed that S41 Members would highlight this with their Local Authorities.

Resolved:

1. That the progress being made in delivering the reducing health inequalities CRMP project, be noted.
2. That it be agreed that S41 Members would highlight the partnership work of SAW with their Local Authorities.

15/22

Digital, Data and Innovation Update

Kash Singh, Strategic Enabler of ICT Digital and Data, presented the Digital, Data and Innovation report that outlined the progress made aligned with the Digital, Data and Innovation Strategy.

The Committee were advised that the Digital, Data and Innovation Strategy had been introduced in December 2021 and steps had been taken to ensure it has been fully embedded within the service including a Digital Leadership Skills course for Middle Managers. The overall strategy had focused upon people first and used technology to improve performance and efficiency and service to the community. Emphasis was given on the need to not exclude members of the community and collaboration inclusion work with the West Midlands Combined Authority had been underway.

The Committee were advised that the West Midlands were 5g and used this as an opportunity to work with partners to gather information to reduce risks. Collaboration work with CCTV, National Police Air Service Cameras and data collection from sensors were examples highlighted.

Work had been underway to ensure that stations had handheld devices to ensure they had the opportunity to go

into the community and be involved/front facing as much as possible. There had been a slight impact with supply due to the part shortages experienced nationally but the service had been on track in its delivery of this. Emphasis was given on the need for cyber security to be incorporated into all aspects of systems therefore, investments had been focused upon this area to ensure the service had the reassurance needed.

Resolved:

1. That the embedding of digital ways of working across the service and acknowledgement of investment in staff to understand and support digital, data and innovation be noted.
2. That the ongoing developments and progress from continued phases of Oracle Cloud, CRMP projects, Digital Transformation on stations be noted. That the introduction of new projects around incident command transformation and legacy systems aligned to the feedback from staff and the next steps outlined in previous Collaboration and Transformation Committee report, be noted.
3. That the emerging opportunities for collaboration with new partner brigades to deliver better, more efficient services to our communities and reduce risk nationally be noted.

16/22

Inclusion and Diversity – Innovation in firefighting equipment

Tom Embury, Deputy Clerk to the Authority provided a verbal update regarding the Inclusion and Diversity – Innovation in firefighting equipment in particular the use of BA equipment and facial hair.

The Committee were advised that further written reports would be provided in future meetings to provide updates to the Committee on this on-going issue. The use of facial hair and BA equipment had still been restricted due to safety requirements and no major companies had developed a mask that passed all the safety test requirements. A future procurement would reflect a want for more research into the development of these masks that would allow staff to have

facial hair. However, in the meantime the service had been looking into the option of facial hair being permitted for non-BA roles within the service from both a policy and a cultural perspective. Although the current policy did not prevent facial hair, the policy needed to be clearer, and staff needed to be informed further. The policy would be looked into and consultation on it would begin the end of the year.

Resolved:

1. That the verbal update on the Inclusion and Diversity – Innovation in firefighting equipment in particular the use of BA equipment and facial hair be noted.

17/22

Draft Collaboration and Transformation Committee Work Programme 2022-2023

Tom Embury, Deputy Clerk to the Authority presented the Draft Collaboration and Transformation Committee Work Programme that outlined the planned agenda items for the Committee 2022-2023.

The Committee were advised that the White Paper and the HMICFRS updates had been time dependent upon their publication by Government. Councillors emphasised the need for progress to be made with the Ambulance / Fire Service collaboration.

Resolved:

1. That the draft Collaboration and Transformation Committee Work Programme 2022-2023 be approved.

18/22

Any other business

The Chair of the Committee advised that she wished to help raise money for the Fire Fighters Charity and wished to have an event focusing upon cultural diversity. Councillors raised concerns around using external venues/potential costs associated and it would be beneficial for local authorities to assist with potential venue options. It was agreed that Tom Embury would link Councillor Dehar with the services officer co-ordinating events with the Fire Fighters Charity to assist with potential links to already on-going fund-raising events.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that Tom Embury would link Councillor Dehar with the services officer co-ordinating events with the Fire Fighters Charity to assist with potential links to already on-going fund-raising events.

19/22

Date of the next meeting

Resolved:

1. That the date of the next meeting scheduled to take place on Monday 12 December 2022, be noted.

The meeting finished at 11:23 hours.

Kirsty Tuffin Strategic Hub 0121 380 6906

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee**07 November 2022**

Conducted as a public meeting at Headquarters and digitally via Microsoft Teams

Present: Councillor Spence (Chair), Councillor Atwal (Vice-Chair), Councillor Barrie, Councillor Dehar, Councillor Hussain, Councillor Waters, Councillor Young and Sarah Middleton, Co-Optee.

Virtual: Paul Hitchen, National Resilience Assurance Team.

Officers: Andrea Simmonds, Kate Alliss, Kirsty Tuffin, Pete Wilson, Simon Barry, Joanne Simmonds, Kelly Whitmore, Kamla Devi-Ahir, Tom Embury.

Additional: Wayne Brown, Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) and Steven Price-Hunt, Fire Brigades Union (FBU).

Please note: Councillor Dehar joined the meeting at 11:07. Paul Hitchen, Home Office, joined the meeting at 13:07. Councillor Atwal left the meeting during the first adjournment at 12noon. Wayne Brown, DCFO, and Steven Price-Hunt, FBU joined at 12:25pm.

Please note: due to an administrative error, item 8 of the agenda Business Continuity Arrangements has been placed after the exclusion of the press and public. It was confirmed that the report had been public, and it was agreed that the report be moved up the agenda to be discussed before the exclusion of the press and public. Supplementary documents had been issued since publication which included the Dispute Resolution Report and outstanding evidence from the Home Office/NFCC, The FBU and other Fire Services. Both the Dispute Resolution Report and DICE Report will be covered under item 6 of the agenda.

15/22 **Apologies**

No apologies were received.

16/22 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

17/22 **Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 23 May 2022**

Resolved:

1. That the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 23 May 2022 were approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

18/22 **Scrutiny Review of Safe & Well**

Andrea Simmonds, Head of Community Safety, presented the Scrutiny Review of Safe and Well 2022 report that outlined the learning/findings and recommendations that arose from the Scrutiny Committee Review of Safe and Wells (SAW).

The Committee were advised that at the Scrutiny Committee on 23 May 2022, a methodology and scoping of the review was agreed. This included four themed workshops focused upon the following:

1. Risk stratification including referrals and relationships with partners
2. Record keeping
3. Delivery including training and development
4. Performance management, quality assurance and evaluation

The Prevention Partnerships and Vulnerability Team held a workshop to contribute to all four themes and test the proposed questions. This workshop found that it would be more beneficial to hold a single larger workshop as a more effective way of engaging stakeholders because of the interdependencies between the four themes. Therefore, a single workshop at the Fire Service Headquarters was held on 7 July 2022, with all stakeholders present contributing to the themes. Alongside the workshop, a Microsoft (MS) Forms questionnaire was developed to open engagement. The key learning from each theme and the key recommendations 1-10, as per appendix 1 of the report, were highlighted.

Following queries, Andrea advised the Committee that rereferrals did take place in all local authorities however, the three areas (Coventry, Wolverhampton and Dudley), were highlighted due to the withdrawal of non-injury response contacts. The committee were advised that the service worked collaboratively with thousands of partners and the workshops allowed as many of them as possible to be involved. Re-assurance was given to members that stations worked with partners on a daily basis and priority had to be given to particular groups. The need for training to be provided to partners that give high levels of referrals was expressed. Re-assurance was given that the team used an online approach to engagement/training via teams to reach the largest number of stakeholders. Following discussions on foodbanks, Simon Barry advised the Committee that the service would not hold information on whether staff were accessing food banks at stations. It was agreed that the number of stations with foodbanks within Walsall be circulated to Councillor Young. It was agreed a progress report be brought to the Committee in April 2023.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the Committee considered and approved the learning and recommendations from the Scrutiny review of Safe & Well (SAW), as outlined in the report.
2. That it be agreed that agreed that the number of stations with foodbanks within Walsall be circulated to Councillor Young.
3. That it be agreed a progress report be brought to the Committee in April 2023.

19/22

Fire Control Performance Report Update – Quarters 1 and 2 2022-23

Kelly Whitmore, Group Commander – Fire Control, presented the Fire Control Performance Report – Quarters 1-2 2022-23, that outlined the operational performance of Fire Control over a six month period.

The Committee were advised that Fire Control received and managed resources for both Staffordshire and West Midlands. As per the report, a total of 47,347 emergency calls were received between 1 April 2022 and 30 September 2022. 33,957 (72%) were for West Midlands and 12,041 (25%) were for Staffordshire. A total of 3% of calls had been taken on behalf of other services. Of the total number of calls received, Fire Control mobilised to 49% of the incidents. The mobilisation ratio of calls had been dependent upon the following:

- Calls challenging automated fire alarms (AFAs)
- Calls challenging special service calls that were deemed non-emergency
- Repeat 999 calls
- Use of 999eye footage/imagery

As per the graphs within the report, Fire Control received a high number of calls during the heatwave period, 14 July 2022 to 14 August 2022. Across a four day period, 17 July to 20 July, Fire Control received a total of 2,745 calls, 916 of those calls were all in one 24-hour period on the 19 July 2022.

During Qtr. 1, the average mobilisation time by Fire Control had been 83 seconds compared to 99 seconds for Qtr. 2. The increase in time handling had been a result of the number of new entrants that joined the Fire Control team, the introduction of Vision 4, a new command and control system, and enhanced questioning to support proportionate and appropriate mobilising of resources.

The Committee were advised that Fire Control amended the initial level of response 1,286 times throughout Qtr. 1 and 2 for incidents. The totals included within the report has either been increased/decreased attendance from the standard pre-determined levels of response. 710 had been increased attendance and 576 had been decreased attendance. 999eye, that assisted Fire Control with intelligence led mobilisation and resource management, had been used a total of 6,343 times during Qtr. 1 and 2. This system allowed Fire Control to receive images/footage and share it with

responding personnel to assist with the incident. Vision 4 had gone live on 7 June 2022. Data on repeat offenders and Automatic Fire alarms would be included in the next report update.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the Fire Control performance update for quarters 1-4 2021-22, be noted.

20/22

Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion, Equality (DICE) Update and Dispute Resolution Report 1 Jan – 30 June 2022

Joanne Simmonds, People Support Manager, presented the bi-annual Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion, Equality (DICE) Update that outlined the progress made by West Midlands Fire Service in advancing DICE.

The Committee were advised that all Stakeholder groups continued to gather momentum following the relaxing of restrictions during the Covid 19 pandemic. The key work of each stakeholder group was highlighted to the Committee. 'Inspire' had actively been involved in the services recruitment processes. As part of a new initiative, in the lead up to celebrations for Ramadan, AFSA helped develop videos of employees talking about Ramadan and celebrations that was circulated across the service to help raise awareness. 'Affinity' had been working with key stakeholders nationally on the work conducted around menopause in the workplace. Members expressed it would be beneficial for the service to have a single policy focused upon the menopause.

Since January 2022, 33 Initial Equality Impact Assessments had been completed. Of these, seven progressed to a Full Equality Impact Assessment. Work was being conducted to develop an Equality Impact Assessment PowerBi dashboard. A Safeguarding toolkit had been produced to help employees with safeguarding. The toolkit is used alongside the safeguarding policy and procedures and the NHS safeguarding app. Any management involved in recruitment would also be provided with training on safe recruitment.

The key figures on the workforce profile, as at 1st October 2022, highlighted to the Committee were:

- WMFS employed a total of 1854 employees of which:
 1. 1359 (73%) were uniform, 425 (23%) non-uniformed and 70 (4%) were Fire Control.
 2. 13% of uniformed staff were female compared to more than half of non-uniformed staff.
 3. 14% of all employees were from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) background.
 4. Declarations had been high, with 90% of employees had made a declaration regarding disability.
 5. Average age of employees had been 43 years.

The Committee were advised that as a result of the pandemic and lack of face-to-face interaction, expectations for new entrants, 50% of all trainee firefighters to be female and 35% to be from a BAME background, had not been achieved. Since the pandemic, figures had slightly increased but it was recognised that more work needed to be done.

The Occupational Health and Wellbeing team continued to provide a range of support to employees including the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). The programme had been expanded to include:

- Assistance with the cost of living crisis, financial and debt advice.
- A new App for mental health, MyMindPal has been launched.
- Self-referral to free telephone counselling. The provision is also available to family members.

It was agreed that the number of attendees to each stakeholder group be provided to members. It was agreed that information on the success of targeted BAME work from Borough to Borough be included in reports moving forward.

Dispute Resolution Report

Kamla Devi-Ahir, Business Partner, presented the Dispute Resolution Report that outlined the number, type and

outcomes of discipline, grievance hearings and other dispute resolution including Employment Tribunal activity that has occurred during a 6-month period 01 January 2022 – 31 June 2022.

The key figures highlighted for the above period, as per the report were:

- Five grievances received, one of which was a collective grievance that involved three employees.
- Nine disciplinary cases, seven of which were gross misconduct, two misconduct.
- Two new employment tribunal cases, one for Constructive Dismissal/age discrimination and one for wrongful dismissal/discrimination
- Three employment tribunal hearing dates over the next 12 months, as per report.

The Committee were provided with a summary of each grievance and disciplinary cases that included the reasoning, the length of each case and the outcomes, as outlined with the report. A robust process had been in place for a thorough debrief to take place after every grievance that allowed the opportunity for feedback to be given.

The Chair of the Joint Consultative Panel advised Members that a training session would take place on Monday 21 November, to understand WMFS policy on managing discipline & grievance and how this aligns to the ACAS code of practice. All Fire Authority Members were invited to attend. It was agreed that Kirsty Tuffin would re-circulate the relevant information on the training session to members.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the ongoing progress made by the service in relation to Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion, Equality (DICE) be noted.
2. That it be agreed that the number of attendees to each stakeholder group be provided to members.
3. That it be agreed that information on the success of targeted BAME work from Borough to Borough be included in reports moving forward.

4. That it be agreed that the Dispute Resolution Report be noted.
5. That it be agreed that Kirsty Tuffin would re-circulate the relevant information on the training session to members.

21/22 **Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2022-2023**

Tom Embury, Deputy Clerk to the Authority, presented the Scrutiny Committee Work Plan for 2022-2023.

The Committee were advised that as agreed under item 4 of the agenda, a SAW Update report would be added to April 2023. He advised that a report on the options for the next Scrutiny Review would be brought to the next Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Resolved:

1. That the Scrutiny Committee Work Plan for 2022-2023, be approved.

The Committee agreed a 20-minute adjournment at 12:05.

The Committee re-convened at 12:25.

22/22 **Scrutiny Committee Working Group – Business Continuity Arrangements**

Tom Embury, Deputy Clerk, provided an overview of the Scrutiny Committee Working Group – Business Continuity Arrangements report. He advised that the matter had been referred to the Committee by Fire Authority on Monday 10 October 2022. Appendix 1 of the report outlined the proposed options taken to Fire Authority. Appendix 2 of the report outlined the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Review. The Committee were advised that all those listed within the TOR had been invited to provide both written and verbal attendance to the Committee.

WMFS Service Evidence

Wayne Brown, Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), was invited to present the evidence on behalf of the Service. He advised the Committee that the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA) had key responsibilities under the following principles and legal obligations:

- Local Authority Nolan Principles that stated the Community must be at the heart of decision making.
- Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004 and National Framework Document 2019 required Fire and Rescue Authorities to assess any risk of emergencies occurring and ensure business continuity.
- Section 2 of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 required contingency/business continuity plans that the Authority had a statutory duty to assess, plan and advise upon.
- The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

The current business continuity arrangements in place were the use of volunteers from non-striking employees, risk management via dynamic cover tool and provision of national resilience capabilities. Corporate Risk 6.1, that was related to Business Continuity and preparedness, had been raised to 16 (RED), as the service did not have confidence in the current arrangements.

Under the current arrangements, the service believed that core functions would not be provided as a result of extensive disruption and the above obligations would not be adhered to unless change was agreed. Failure to comply with the above legislation could result in intervention from the Secretary of State, increased likelihood of harm to the community due to reduction in services and impact employees due to insufficient resources being available to apply safe systems of work.

As the current arrangements relied upon good will, a letter was circulated by the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) to all 1854 employees that requested a non-obligatory response on their intentions to strike or not. The intention had been to assess the number of employees the service may have should a

strike take place. 93 responses were received. Of the 93, 65 responded 'yes' they would be willing to work during strike action which totalled 3.5% of the total workforce, 16 responded 'no' and 12 responded 'prefer not to say'.

In July 2022, the National Resilience Assurance Team conducted a survey with Fire and Rescue Services on Business Continuity Arrangements for Industrial Action. As a result of this survey, the West Midlands Fire Services (WMFS) had been rated high risk (RED) due to the lack of re-assurance that 30% of services could be provided under strike action. A meeting with the Chief Fire Officer and Chair of the Authority would take place with the Home Office whereby an explanation would be required as to why WMFS had been rated RED.

A SWOT analysis had been conducted for all options presented and were as follows:

- Current arrangements – low confidence. Due to insufficient staffing levels to provide an emergency response to all incident types.
- Internal Resilience Contracts – medium confidence. Aimed to ensure current employees provided additional emergency cover but the level of staff that would sign up is unknown.
- External Resilience Contracts – medium confidence. WMFS could ensure standards of training be provided but the level of applicants would be unknown and the time to take to introduce would be significant.
- External provider – high confidence. Guaranteed a minimum level of resources would be provided during potential industrial action.

The estimated financial considerations to incorporate the above options was highlighted to members. These included the following:

- Internal resilience contracts: average retainer fee in other Fire Services had been £1000-£2000 per contract, annually.

- External resilience contracts: average annual cost of £140k (without Industrial Action (IA), mobilisation costs based upon 8 days continuous IA average cost was £80k (25 staff).
- External provider: average cost without IA of £164k, mobilisation costs based upon 8 days continuous IA average cost was £464k.

The DCFO advised the Committee that the proposed changes to the current business continuity arrangements made no judgement on those wishing to strike and officers knew the impact this would be having on staff; however, the service did have a legal duty to ensure that services could still be provided in the event of strike action.

Following queries around the methods used to engage with employees and on what had changed to cause 6.1 to be raised, DCFO advised the Committee that the views of the service had not changed since 2019, whereby a report was rejected by Scrutiny Committee to change the business continuity arrangements. It was felt that multiple factors including the cost-of-living crisis impacting upon all employees only emphasised the need to change the current arrangements further. The service did not wish to pressure employees to respond to the CFOs question on their intention to strike as this was deemed inappropriate and may constitute harassment. It was emphasised that employees had a legal right to strike and had no requirement to inform the service of their intention to do so.

Following queries around funding, the DCFO advised the Committee that any funding would need to be incorporated into the current budget and no additional funding would be provided by the Home Office. Following queries by the Chair of the Committee, the DCFO advised the Committee that as current industrial action would likely be a national strike, no additional staff from other areas could be called upon. All areas are responsible for their own business continuity. External provider employees would be trained adequately from a health and safety perspective. It was emphasised that

it did not need to be one option and a blended approach could be utilised.

Fire Brigades Union Evidence

Steven Price-Hunt, West Midlands Brigade Secretary, was invited to present the evidence on behalf of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). He advised the Committee that the FBU had serious concerns around any potential changes to contingency arrangements as outlined within the report and the damage this would cause to industrial relationships. The rationale behind the changes referenced a requirement under The Fire Services Act 2004 and Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The Fire Services Act sections 7,8 and 9 explained the role of responding to fires and road traffic collisions, and that services needed to make provisions to provide coverage. The Civil Contingencies Act Section 2 (1) (C) explained 'maintain plans for the purpose of ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable, that if an emergency occurs that person or body is able to perform his or its functions.' Steven emphasised the wording to be 'so far as is reasonably practicable,'.

There were concerns by the FBU with the costs associated to any changes implemented and expressed the view that these costs would exceed the predicted quarter of a million pounds. The external providers had been advertising for these roles with huge salaries to try and entice people to apply. It was felt this was unfair to employees, given the campaign for better pay as a result of the cost of living, that external companies could pay up to 50% more than that of firefighters.

The FBU did not believe that the external companies would have the capacity to deliver as those contracted would require breaks and annual leave. This would result in an estimated two vehicles being available although, contracted/paid for five vehicles. It was felt that the companies were approaching all services without having the resources ready as they had been in the process of job advertising. The FBU raised concerns around the advertisements from external companies that declared 12

days of training would be provided. They did not feel this was adequate and sufficient enough. Alongside this, the lack of local knowledge and use of safety critical equipment would put employees at risk under the Health and Safety at Work Act. Steven advised the Committee, that should this option be implemented and employees felt unsafe working alongside externally contracted, advice would be given to withdraw their services.

The Committee were advised that a recall system had already been in place, should a strike take place. If a reasonable recall to duty process for Fire fighters could be presented, the FBU would sign to provide that a level of assurance if industrial action took place. The FBU had consulted with its members, and they opposed the proposal to change business continuity arrangements. The FBU felt if changes were implemented it would antagonise the workforce and would result in more Firefighters taking industrial action if it took place.

Following questions by the Chair of the Committee, Steven advised the Committee that Unions would not be able to guarantee that 30% of the workforce would be available should there be industrial action. To ensure that, fairer pay would need to be provided to employees. Members expressed the need for the Home Office to be convinced that the required level of resources needed would be provided. Steven advised the Committee that historical events had shown that firefighters would respond should a major incident be declared. Following queries around FBU members being asked to provide the required 30%, Steven advised the Committee that the 30% of resources had been a request by the Home Office.

National Resilience Assurance Team Evidence

Paul Hitchen was invited to present the evidence on behalf of the Home Office/National Fire Chief Council. He advised the Committee that the business continuity survey was conducted annually with a range of questions. As a result of information not being readily available around the level of cover that could be provided during industrial action, WMFS

had been rated high risk (RED). The Chair of the Committee asked that the result be reviewed to take into consideration the good will of firefighters as it was felt employees did not intend to strike.

Following questions around the approach taken to receive responses, Paul Hitchen advised the Committee that all questions were submitted to WMFS for response. All questions had been answered but as the service could not provide a definite number of resources that would be available during industrial action, they were deemed high risk. He highlighted that all services nationally take part in the survey and WMFS had been the only service that could not provide this re-assurance.

The DCFO advised the Committee that the letter from the CFO to employees on their intention to strike had been a result of the survey questions by the National Resilience team. Following questions around legal restrictions and contacting employees on their intentions, the DCFO emphasised that it would not be morally right to push employees for a response as it could be received as harassment/manipulation. The FBU agreed with the DCFO that further correspondence with employees/additional pressure to provide their intentions to strike or not would be inappropriate.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that all evidence presented be noted.

23/22

Exclusion of the public and press

Resolved:

1. That the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006."

The Committee agreed a 15-minute adjournment at 14:06.

The Committee re-convened at 14:21.

24/22

Private Workshop for Members

Discussion was opened up to Members to deliberate on all evidence presented during item 8 of the agenda, including written evidence. Members expressed concerns that External Providers had not had the chance to respond to comments made by the FBU around the level of training provided to its employees. Tom Embury assured Members that external companies had been invited to provide evidence but had declined to attend due to capacity. It was agreed that more information be provided on the training provided by external companies. Members desired a different approach to be taken on engagement with staff around their decision to strike or not. Members wished to be provided with data from 2019.

It was agreed that a named vote be conducted on the options outlined as per the report. Members voted as follows:

Option 1a/1b – Internal/External Resilience Contracts/workforce:
Councillor Barrie – For
Councillor Dehar – Against
Councillor Hussain – Against
Councillor Spence – Against
Councillor Waters – Abstain
Councillor Young – Against

Option 2 – External Provider:
Councillor Barrie – For
Councillor Dehar – Against
Councillor Hussain – Against
Councillor Spence – Against
Councillor Waters – Abstain
Councillor Young – Against

It was agreed that a recommendation be presented to Fire Authority to continue with current practice. It was agreed that Tom Embury would draft the report on behalf of Scrutiny Committee and circulate to members for

comments/amendments/approval prior to Fire Authority publication.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that options 1a, 1b and 2 be rejected following a named vote.
2. That it be agreed that a recommendation be presented to Fire Authority to continue with current practice. That it be agreed that Tom Embury, would draft the report on behalf of Scrutiny Committee and circulate to members for comments/amendments/approval prior to Fire Authority publication.
3. That it be agreed that more information be provided on the training provided by external companies, further consideration made of how the staff could provide information on their intention to strike, and data be provided from 2019.

The meeting finished at 14:59 hours.

Kirsty Tuffin Strategic Hub 0121 380 6906
