

# Making the West Midlands SAFER, STRONGER, HEALTHIER Statement of Assurance Summary

In line with our legal and statutory responsibilities, this document provides assurance on our financial, governance, and operational matters. It shows how we have had due regard to our Integrated Risk Management Plan and strategy 'Our Plan', and the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE  
2018/2019

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## FOREWORD



**GREG BRACKENRIDGE**  
Chair of the Fire Authority



**PHIL LOACH**  
Chief Fire Officer

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   @WestMidsFire

As a public service, we are responsible for ensuring that public money is properly accounted for and spent in a way that provides value for money.

In line with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and the statutory requirement for public bodies to publish the financial results of their activities for the year, we publish our [Statement of Accounts](#) each July following approval by the Audit and Risk Committee. The Statement of Accounts are then presented to all Members for noting at Fire Authority (hereafter 'the Authority') each September. Alternatively, the accounts can be viewed in summary format in the document, [Summary of Accounts](#).

The Statement of Accounts are independently verified on an annual basis by an external auditor. Members of the public and local government electors have certain rights in the audit process prior to the formal approval and publication of the Statement of Accounts. These rights are set out in the [Audit of Accounts](#).

The Authority's external audit work is undertaken by the private audit practice Grant Thornton UK LLP. As well as auditing the accounts, the external auditor is required to conclude whether the Authority has in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency

and effectiveness in its use of resources (known as the value for money conclusion). The full external audit work programme and the risk-based approach to its determination are explained in the external auditor's [Audit Plan](#).

The external auditor reports their findings and provide their opinion on the Authority's accounts and the value for money conclusion to the Audit and Risk Committee each July (and presented to all Members at the September Authority meeting). This information is included within the external auditors [Audit Findings Report](#) and the Authority's Statement of Accounts (Independent Auditor's Report). As a result of the external audit work in 2018/19, there were no significant matters arising that required the Authority to implement an action for improvement.

The [Annual Audit Letter](#) summarises the key findings from the external audit work undertaken for the 2018/19 audit year. It confirms that the external auditor issued an unqualified opinion on the Authority's 2018/19 financial statements, and that the external auditor concluded that the Authority had proper arrangements in all significant respects to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness and to ensure it



delivered value for money in its use of resources for the year ending 31 March 2019.

As part of the 2016/17 Finance Settlement, the Government offered four-year funding allocations to 2019-20 in return for robust and transparent efficiency plans. The Service's [Efficiency Plan](#), which outlines how the Service planned to introduce further efficiencies over the four-year period in which the Authority would receive reductions in core funding of approximately £10 million, is monitored by the Service and progress is reported on an annual basis to the Authority as part of the budget-setting process.





# GOVERNANCE AND REVIEW OF THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

*West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority was reformed in 2018 following the publication of the Fire and Rescue Authority (Membership) Order 2017. Changes included the reduction in the number of elected Members, the addition of co-opted Members, and the streamlining of its committee structure.*

*The Authority comprises 15 elected Members (representing the 7 local authorities that make up the West Midlands metropolitan county), the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, and two co-opted Members (one representing health and one representing business).*

The Authority has a [Constitution](#) which explains how decisions are made. There is no statutory requirement for a Fire and Rescue Authority to provide one, however we consider it good governance to do so. The Constitution is available on the internet via our Committee Management Information System, which also includes the details of all Authority and Committee meetings, reports, minutes, and records of decisions.

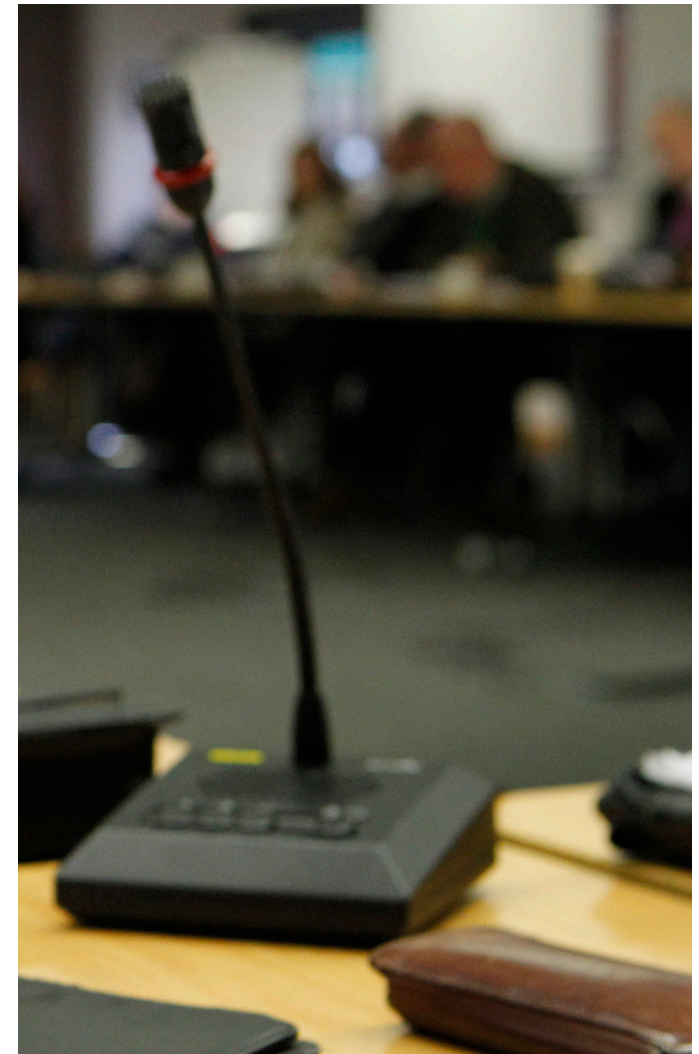
The Authority embraces the seven principles of good governance (in line with CIPFA/SOLACE guidance 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government:

Framework 2016'), with clear lines of accountability for any decisions it makes, and clear rules, regulations, policies and practices which govern how those decisions are made and implemented. The Authority has developed and adopted a local [Code of Corporate Governance](#) which brings together all the governance and accountability arrangements that the Authority has in place.

In progressing Fire and Public Service reform, we commissioned an independent evaluation of the potential models of governance for the Service. As a result, the Authority investigated alternative governance arrangements during 2018/19 including a proposed transfer of governance of the Service to the West Midlands Mayor and the Mayoral West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). Following extensive work in consultation with key stakeholders including the Home Office, WMCA, and the Local Authorities of the West Midlands, the transfer of governance was not progressed. The governance arrangements of the Service remain with the reformed West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority. We continue to collaborate with the seven Local Authorities, WMCA, and other partners to reduce vulnerability and risk within our communities aligned to our Integrated Risk Management Plan and our strategy, 'Our Plan'.

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In line with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, we publish an annual [Governance Statement](#) in support of the statement of accounts. It is considered by the Authority's Audit and Risk Committee in June each year and is included within the Statement of Accounts. The Governance Statement explains the measures taken by the Authority to ensure appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance. This includes the scope of responsibility of the Authority, explains the governance framework, its purpose, and the review of its effectiveness, significant governance arrangements within the Authority including audit work undertaken during the year, and a certificate declaring the effective operation of governance arrangements signed by the Chief Fire Officer and the Chair of the Fire Authority.

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values by which the Authority assures the delivery of services, including its activities through which it engages with, and is accountable to, the community. It enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, value-for-money services.

The system of internal control is a significant part of the framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to

achieve policies, aims and objectives and can, therefore, only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control 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 and potential impact of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The review of the effectiveness of the governance framework is informed by the work of the statutory officers and principal managers of the Authority who have the responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the internal audit annual report and comments made by the external auditors in their annual audit letter and other reports.

The review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control is informed by the work undertaken by internal audit during the year, the work undertaken by the external auditor reported in their annual audit, and other work undertaken by independent inspection bodies.

The work undertaken during the year with regard to both the review of the governance framework and the

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review of the system of internal control are detailed within the Governance Statement.

The Audit and Risk Committee produces an [Annual Report](#) which sets out in detail the business undertaken by the Committee, its achievements and its conclusion upon the adequacy of the system of internal control, governance and risk management in the Authority. The conclusion of the Committee is derived from, and informed by, the work of the internal audit and the compilation of the annual Governance Statement. As a result of this work, the Committee was able to confirm:

That the system of internal control, governance and risk management in the Fire Authority was adequate in identifying risks and allowing the Fire Authority to understand the appropriate management of these risks. That there were no areas of significant duplication or omission in the systems of internal control, governance and risk management that had come to the Committee's attention and had not been adequately resolved'.

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.

The information provided in the links below provides additional information on how the Authority has spent its public money, demonstrating the Authority's commitment to transparency and accountability:

- Contracts information and expenditure over £500
- Salary information
- Pay Policy Statement
- Member Allowances Scheme
- The location of land and building assets
- Counter fraud information

*How the Statement of Assurance meets the guidance as outlined within the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018 is available [here](#).*

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The Authority meets the requirements set out in the:

- Fire and Rescue Service 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 Authority is committed to the principles of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 and proactively works in collaboration with the Police and Ambulance Service, as well as a variety of agencies and organisations locally, regionally and nationally.

All Fire and Rescue Authorities are required to produce, consult upon, and publish an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). The Authority's IRMP contains our analysis of fire and rescue related risks in the West Midlands. It is the foundation upon which we build our Service Delivery Model. It shows how we will target our resources so that we can prevent incidents from happening, while also making sure resources are

located in the most effective manner to best protect the community. This enables the Service to continue providing the highest standards of service in the areas of prevention, protection and response through our Service Delivery Model. (See infographic on page 10)

The Authority's IRMP is represented in a visual manner in the form of the [Community Safety Strategy](#), which is available on the [wmfs.net](#) website. It is an interactive tool which not only provides an overview of the West Midlands area, but also enables members of the local community to view information which is relevant to where they live.

The Authority consults on its IRMP in accordance with national guidance. The last formal public consultation was held in 2016 and, therefore, the Authority will be consulting on its IRMP again in late 2019.

The Authority has mutual assistance arrangements in place with all Fire and Rescue Services surrounding the West Midlands (Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Services). These are referred to as Section 13 and 16 arrangements (in reference to the relevant sections of the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004). Such arrangements include providing assistance to neighbouring Fire Authorities in the event of a large-scale incident, or where the resources of the

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recipient Fire Authority are seriously reduced. Section 16 arrangements vary in detail from Authority to Authority but, essentially, they are a commitment to a neighbouring Fire and Rescue Authority to mobilise appliances to pre-agreed areas in the event of an emergency call being received.

The Authority is a partner in the West Midlands Conurbation Local Resilience Forum (LRF), the statutory multi-agency partnership set up to ensure the local authorities, emergency services and environment agency in partnership with other organisations including utility companies fulfil their duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The forum is chaired by West Midlands Fire Service and brings together organisations to plan and prepare for localised incidents and catastrophic emergencies that may impact the communities of the West Midlands. The strategic objectives of the of the LRF are enabled through the General Working Group which involves members from all organisations that attend the LRF. Partners record lessons learnt and share information on planning and response through joint organisational learning. This knowledge is shared via the online portal Resilience Direct.

More localised planning arrangements are further considered within each of the Local Authority areas across the West Midlands via Local Resilience Groups. West Midlands Fire Service officers engage within these

groups and work collaboratively with other responders and partner agencies to protect communities.

In support of National Resilience, and enabled through central Government funding, we have enhanced our capability to respond to major emergencies such as terrorist attacks, industrial and domestic accidents and natural disasters. We have several national resilience assets that can be called upon in the event of a national incident, such as high-volume pumps. We are a partner in the Multi-Agency Specialist Assessment Team (MASAT) which provides an 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 are on call 24/7 providing the ability to rapidly respond to incidents locally, nationally, and internationally, assisting and undertaking search and rescue operations. Our ISAR team is able to respond to humanitarian accidents or disasters anywhere in the world.

The Service works together with other emergency services at major incidents and emergencies on an ever-increasing basis. The Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP) was introduced

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nationally to provide the pathway as to how emergency services can work together more effectively. It helps the emergency services better understand each other's expertise and ways of working, improving how they can jointly deal with an emergency, such as enabling better integration and more efficient and effective management of such incidents. The Service is actively involved in the programme and is implementing JESIP into the organisation.

The Service also runs the regional arrangements for the National Inter-Agency Liaison Officer cadre (NILO) which supports cross-emergency service organisational information sharing to support complex incident resolution.

The National Operational Guidance (NOG) Programme is a partnership programme working with fire and rescue services to deliver new national operational guidance that is consistent, easily accessible and can be quickly revised and updated if necessary. NOG covers areas including operations, incident command, and environmental protection covering activities such as fires and firefighting, performing rescues, and hazardous materials. WMFS is adopting NOG both locally and regionally. In alignment with the NOG approach, the Service has a gap analysis, action plan and implementation framework in place. It also

supports a regional action plan for implementing NOG, in partnership with the other fire and rescue services within the region.

Our protection work is focused on helping businesses to thrive, supporting business growth and economic sustainability. We help business communities to become safer from fire and assist businesses to comply with the Regulatory Reform Order. This assistance may take the form of educational events, signposting to relevant guidance and the checking and auditing of fire protection measures. We are committed to enforcing the law so that members of the public and local employees are protected from the risk of death or injury caused by fire. We are proactive in taking enforcement action for the non-compliance of fire safety regulations and have a dedicated team comprising specialist fire safety officers that work to build such prosecution cases.

The Service has a risk-based inspection programme which we continue to develop and enhance as per the requirements of the National Framework and we have adopted the principles of the Regulators Code. Fire safety audits focus on commercial premises that have an associated risk, such as a sleeping area above a shop. Following the Grenfell Tower fire, the Service re-prioritised its risk-based inspection programme.

The Service inspected all residential high-rise buildings

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within the West Midlands as a priority, inspected buildings identified with flammable cladding, and supported the Home Office in the national co-ordination of the checking of high-rise premises and the cladding materials.

We are committed to supporting the health, fitness and wellbeing of all our employees and we recognise our duty to ensure they maintain the required level

of fitness to fulfil their roles safely. The Service has a fitness framework and carries out fitness assessments annually on all operational staff.





## FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Based upon our IRMP and through taking an evidence-based approach, we believe that response times matter in relation to survivability and economic growth. Our Service Delivery Model is built upon a resource configuration that enables us to meet our risk-based, 5-minute response standard for the most serious incidents and to deliver an assertive, effective and safe response. Based upon risk, a blended fleet of vehicles, crewing levels and skill sets are dynamically mobilised to provide the right weight of response. This blended fleet is made up of:

- 3 Business Support Vehicles, crewed by a Fire Safety Officer
- 19 Brigade Response Vehicles, crewed by two firefighters and a supervisory officer
- 41 fire engines, crewed by four firefighters and a supervisory officer (two fire engines also have Technical Rescue capability)
- a number of specialist vehicles including aerial appliances

Demonstrating public sector reform, we continue to embed new and innovative approaches to staffing through the use of a lean, wholetime workforce supported through a system of Voluntary Additional

Shifts (VAS) and integrated resilience. Firefighters have the opportunity to undertake VAS on days where they are not scheduled to be on duty and integrated resilience enables uniformed staff based in departments to regularly crew response vehicles covering for any staffing deficiencies. Integrated resilience also enables such uniformed staff to maintain their core competencies and enables the transfer of skills and knowledge. This approach has enabled us to reduce our wholetime workforce naturally to 1,220 firefighters which includes 52 Technical Rescue firefighters, with VAS used to cover shortfalls in staffing. As a result, significant budget savings continue to be realised whilst maintaining the highest levels of service delivery to our communities.

Additionally, effective risk management through the flexibility in fleet availability and local management of staffing has enabled us to maintain our risk-based, 5-minute response standard whilst making savings in line with the Authority's Financial Efficiency Plan.

We continue to review our fleet, ensuring the correct vehicle types are being deployed, with state-of-the-art equipment and technology, so that response times can be maintained with fewer firefighters. Our Fire Control utilise a system called the Dynamic Cover Tool which provides a real-time visual aid of where resources are located within the West Midlands, supporting



# FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS



decision making and the management, deployment and movement of resources, to provide optimum response times, matching resource to risk.

We continue to integrate our prevention, protection and response activity which enables us to deliver the Authority's strategic priorities and objectives, as outlined within 'Our Plan', efficiently and effectively. By providing the right training and support for our staff, they can support each other working more closely together as 'one team'. Our fire safety team will be able to support our prevention priorities - for example, they could be carrying out an inspection at a business premises and identify some vulnerable people; we want them to be able to help. Likewise, whilst spending time amongst their community, firefighters might encounter fire safety concerns and, with the right training, they will be able to offer the appropriate fire safety advice.

Due to additional responsibilities as a direct result of the Grenfell Tower fire and other local large scale projects such as High Speed Rail (HS2), the Commonwealth Games, and the Coventry City of Culture, the Authority is investing in its protection capability to ensure it continues to comply with its statutory responsibilities of consultation on Building Regulations applications and the completion of Fire Safety audits in high-risk properties.

Digital ways of working are a key enabler to ensuring we are using our resources effectively and efficiently to meet our strategic priorities and objectives. As our workforce becomes more mobile and spends as much time as possible in the community, they need to be able to access accurate and useful information when they need it. The Service continues to develop and implement a variety of digital solutions to support its staff.

Examples include the Risk Identification and Data Gathering Engine (RIDGE) which will determine and prioritise both life risk and fire risk identified through our IRMP. This will prioritise premises for fire safety visits, provide the quick retrieval of information to enable targeted activity, and enable an evidence-based approach confirming that risk and vulnerability are being reduced.

Safe and Well visits are an important part of our prevention activity. They enable us to advise and educate on safety at home, with a particular focus on our most vulnerable residents. We have developed the Tymly system which is a digital solution for gathering Safe and Well information more quickly and easily. We are exploring ways in which the system can be used to generate automated referrals to partner organisations such as falls prevention, can prioritise households with regard to the level of risk ensuring that Safe and Well

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# FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS



visits are provided to those who need them most, and the development of an online partner and public facing appointments system.

We have introduced a portfolio management approach to managing workstreams across the Service. It provides us with an agile, flexible and adaptable way of working whilst creating an environment of accountability and an understanding of the value realised through the investment in our activities. It enables us to tell our story more effectively based upon evidence and creates an internal understanding of our priorities in relation to value. It also provides a foundation on which our organisation and the services provided can be audited and inspected against value.

We continue to challenge some calls received by our Fire Control to minimise the number of false alarms responded to, ensuring we have enough resources to mobilise in the most effective manner to calls where lives and property are in danger. We continue to use the 999eye system which allows callers to send images and footage from the scene of an incident to Fire Control. These images and footage can allow Fire Control to mobilise the most appropriate resources and provide vital information to the crews who are responding.

We really value the trust our communities place in our organisation and staff. It lets us into the lives of some

of the West Midlands most vulnerable residents. We want our workforce to reflect the amazing diversity of the West Midlands. We do a lot of work to make sure we attract and recruit people from groups that are under-represented at the Service. We actively encourage applications from female candidates and from members of the West Midlands black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities.

The Service received an inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in quarters three and four of 2018. The findings of which will be reported in the Statement of Assurance 2019-20. In the interim, the final report of HMICFRS and accompanying documentation will be available via both the HMICFRS and WMFS website.

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