

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 FEBRUARY 2020

1. **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE BRIEFING – OVERVIEW OF WATER RELATED INCIDENTS**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer.

RECOMMENDED

THAT the Scrutiny Committee note the overview of water related incidents (appendix 1).

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report is submitted to Scrutiny Committee to provide Members with an overview of water related incidents and the Service's approach to water safety and the prevention of such incidents.

3. **BACKGROUND**

3.1 The report 'Analysis of Progress of Quarterly Performance Against The Plan Quarter 2 2019-20' was submitted at the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11 November 2020. As part of deliberations of the report by Members, water related incidents and the approach by the Service to water safety and related prevention activities was discussed.

3.2 As a result of the discussions outlined above, and upon the request by the Scrutiny Committee for further information, this report has been submitted to provide an overview of water related incidents and the Service's approach to water safety and the prevention of such incidents (see Appendix 1).

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications arising from this report

7. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11 November 2019

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PHIL LOACH
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

Scrutiny Committee Briefing Over of Water Related Incidents – Appendix 1

Background

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA) has a legal duty to provide a fire and rescue service that meets the needs of the local community. It is responsible for providing, training and equipping a Fire and Rescue Service capable of undertaking the Core Functions within the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (FRS Act 2004).

- Fire safety
- Fire-fighting
- Road traffic accidents
- Other emergency rescue activities

Under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, the Fire Authorities have the power to respond to other eventualities, which water related incidents are classed, however, they do not have a statutory duty to do so.

The priorities and objectives for WMFRA are set out within the Fire and Rescue National Framework (May 2018), which are;

- make appropriate provision for fire prevention and protection activities and response to fire and rescue related incidents;
- identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks their areas face;
- collaborate with emergency services and other local and national partners to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the service they provide;
- be accountable to communities for the service they provide;
- and
- develop and maintain a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse.

The Civil Contingencies Act (2004) requires Category One Responders to maintain plans for preventing emergencies and for reducing, controlling or mitigating the effects of emergencies in both the response and recovery phases. Local Resilience Forums are encouraged to develop specific flood plans, a multi-agency flood plan (MAFP), to complement other partners' plans, and to

provide more detail to generic Major Incident Plans. In spring 2006 the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) undertook a detailed capability assessment of flood emergency planning and preparedness in England and Wales, based on the outputs of a National Capability Survey undertaken the same year. The analysis showed a shortfall in capability to rescue people when compared against the planning assumptions for a severe East Coast flood.

The floods in summer 2007 tested flood rescue capability across England. Sir Michael Pitt's review praised the role of many organisations carrying out flood rescue, including both statutory and voluntary organisations. The Pitt Review concluded that a national framework (Concept of Operations) was required, establishing standards for typing and accreditation of rescue teams and setting standards for equipment and training.

The Defra Flood Rescue Concept of Operations was produced as part of the project along with a Flood Rescue National Asset Register. This register contained accredited teams which met the team typing standards, enabling teams to be deployed nationally in the event of a wide area flood incident. This facilitates different local capabilities being 'plugged' seamlessly into a regional or national response during wide area flooding.

Capability

West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) believes in operational excellence and through our Integrated Risk Management Plan we prepare for all foreseeable risks. Our response priorities focus on dealing excellently with emergency incidents, where the risk to life will be reduced through our commitment to operational excellence, enabling an assertive, effective and safe emergency response to all incidents whilst supporting firefighter safety.

Water related incidents can involve rescues from rivers, lakes, canals and waterways or involving flooding. WMFS crews not only respond to incidents within the West Midlands area to help people, but our skills and expertise can be called upon Nationally to support other Fire and Rescue Services affected by major incidents.

WMFS has the ability to respond to these types of incidents

through both equipment and competent firefighters. Our firefighters are trained to six different levels;

- Level 1 – Water awareness

All firefighters are trained and assessed to this level and all of our response vehicles carry personal floatation devices (PFD) and in addition, all Pump Rescue Ladders carry life jackets which enable us to work near water. This level enables firefighters to carry out a land-based rescue and not enter the water.

Additionally, firefighters can carry out a Voluntary water rescue swimmer assessment, this would mean that they could enter the water to conduct a rescue swim. Since May 2019, there are 167 firefighters who have completed this assessment and able to conduct the rescue swim.

- Level 2 – Water rescue first responder

Level 2 water rescue personnel are deployed to wading water incidents where personnel can lead persons to safety in shallow water. Additionally, they have awareness of unstable surface hazards such as mud and ice which may be encountered at water and flood incidents.

There are currently four fire stations trained to this level, Perry Barr, Sheldon, Woodgate Valley and Coventry. This is further supplemented by the two Technical Rescue Stations (TRU), at Bickenhill and Wednesbury.

- Level 3 – Water rescue technician (undertaken by TRU)

Specialist rescue personnel who have been trained in all aspects of water rescue and can deploy systems of work that allow a person to enter the water to affect a rescue in moving water

- Level 4 – Water rescue power boat operator

Technical Rescue crews are trained to operate the power rescue craft.

- Level 5 – Water incident management

Watch Commanders within TRU are trained to be able to advise and command at water incidents.

- Level 6 – Subject matter advisors

We have 6 personnel trained as Tactical Advisors who are members of Technical Rescue. They are trained to provide tactical advice in relation to major or wider-spread flood or water rescue incidents nationally.

Equipment

The equipment available within the WMFS to support crews at water related incidents, is as follows;

- Level 1 on PRL's – throw line, hose inflation kit, PFD's, life jacket and crew saver.
- Level 2 – in addition to PRL, dry suits, helmets, boots, wading poles and extendable reach pole.
- Level 3 – ice paths, inflatable boat, rigid boat, sub-surface viewer and additional lines.

These resources are located across our delivery area based upon our Integrated Risk Management Plan. These resources are also available for national deployment, which we have supported on several occasions at incidents across the country.

Operational incidents

Water related incidents are generally recorded under 'Special Service Calls' and have three Subgroups, Flooding (Environmental), Leaks and blockages and Rivers etc (not Flooding).

Between April 2016 and March 2019 there has been 1,941 Water related incidents. There have been specific events which have led to an increase in incidents, the rise in 2017-18 is mainly due to an increase in incidents in March 2018. March 2018 saw the 'beast from the east' which led to burst pipes caused by the cold. The 2018-19 rise (rise when compared to 2016-17) was due to the floods in May 2018.

SSC Sub-group	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Flooding (Environmental)	143	116	100
Leaks and blockages	385	682	431
Rivers etc (not flooding)	24	32	28
Total	552	830	559

SSC subgroup	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Flooding (Env)	143	116	100
Other (advice only, pumping out, stand by, etc)	106	99	76
Rescue/evacuation	37	17	24
Leaks and blockages	385	682	431
Other (Advice only, pumping out, stand by, etc)	355	642	404
Rescue/evacuation	30	40	27
Rivers etc (not flooding)	24	32	28
Rescue/evacuation	24	32	28

SSC subgroup	Rescues (incl. casualties who were rescued)	Injuries	Fatalities
Leaks and blockages	16	15	1

2016-17	11	5	0
2017-18	1	5	1
2018-19	4	5	0
Flooding (Env)	107	10	0
2016-17	34	5	0
2017-18	5	2	0
2018-19	68	3	0
River etc (not flooding)	48	35	14
2016-17	13	9	3
2017-18	19	11	6
2018-19	16	15	5

Water Safety advice

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has a Drowning prevention and water safety campaign which is called 'Be Water Aware'. This aims to raise awareness of the risk of accidental drowning.

The NFCC is a member of the National Water Safety forum and is committed to the National Drowning Prevention Strategy which aims to cut water related deaths by 50% by 2026.

Drowning is amongst the leading causes of accidental death in the UK. We want to make people safer by making them aware of the risks and dangers when around water, what to do if they fall into water and how to help someone who is in trouble in water.

To support FRS's during 'Drowning Prevention and Water Safety Week' the NFCC issue a campaign toolkit to participating FRS's. This includes information on Key messages for raising awareness with the focus groups. Safety advice, what to do if you fall in water. Drowning Prevention and Water Safety Week - #BeWaterAware – 20th -26th April 2020.

WMFS provides information on our website about Water Safety, where there are sections about open water, flooding and boat safety. These sections all provide relevant safety advice when around water along with useful links for more information and resources that are available. Additionally, there is information provided within the Safe and Well booklet that should be left after

every visit.

At Safeside Eastside the main programme for primary schools, called Smart Choices, has a section on water safety and concentrates on cold water shock, helping others and how to get help in an emergency.