

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

14TH FEBRUARY 2011

1. **NATIONAL RESILIENCE ASSURANCE TEAM (NRAT) REVIEW OF WMFS URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE CAPABILITY**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

RECOMMENDED

THAT the report be noted.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report is submitted to inform members of the outcome of a recent assurance review of the West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) Urban Search and Rescue capability.

3. **BACKGROUND**

3.1 WMFS holds a number of National Resilience assets as part of the planned national response to significant and catastrophic incidents. This comprises the following capabilities:

- mass decontamination
- Detection, Identification and Monitoring (DIM) of hazardous substances
- high volume pumping, and
- Urban Search and Rescue (USAR)

3.2 The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) funds the National Resilience Assurance Team (NRAT) in order to provide the Secretary of State with independent assurance that the various capabilities deployed across England are at the required state of preparedness and readiness.

3.3 Periodically, the NRAT officers will visit Fire and Rescue Services to audit the capability. In December 2010, WMFS hosted a 2 day visit by 4 team members with a specific focus on the USAR capability. The team met with a Principal Officer, Technical Rescue Unit (TRU) staff based at Bickenhill Fire Station and Fire Control staff.

3.4 The review had the following objectives:

- to identify the organisational strategies, policies, training and procedures that supports the Urban Search & Rescue assets in meeting the National Resilience programme expectations for responding to national level incidents.
- to identify and confirm that programmed vehicle and equipment maintenance, servicing and defect records for National Resilience assets are completed in accordance within the terms and conditions of use.

Specifically the following aspects were reviewed - crewing and attributes, training, vehicles and equipment, health and safety, communications and mobilising.

3.5 In each of the areas assessed a Fire and Rescue Service is graded as either displaying Notable Practice, Advanced Practice, Established Practice or Developing Practice.

3.6 The assessment report, which was received by WMFS in January 2011, describes no areas where the Service has developing practice, 4 areas of advanced practice and 1 area of notable practice. All other areas are considered to be displaying established practice. It should be noted that areas of notable practice are rarely identified, and as such are shared with national USAR teams.

3.7 The concluding comments of the report include the following significant findings:

- “WMFS has created a unique operational capability, in which the USAR capability plays a major role, by creating a Technical Rescue Unit available to the whole Service as an operational capability. The Service is fully committed to supporting National Resilience and this is clearly demonstrated through the evidence provided. The Service is innovative and continually strives to look at ways of providing greater capability to resolve emerging and established risks in the most professional and efficient manner.”
- “The USAR team members and management demonstrate a culture of continual development and high professional standards.”

- “The established areas are of such a high standard [that] they would be worth sharing if required across other services.”
- “The Service has set very high standards and continually achieves through innovation and continued investment in infrastructure and specialist personnel.”

3.8 Members may recall that the WMFS received a similar report of exceptionally high standards following an NRAT review of the mass decontamination capability in 2010.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Act 2004 required Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) to follow the guidance in the Fire and Rescue National Framework. Chapter Two of that document sets out the requirements of FRAs in respect of resilience.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NRAT report 2011

VIJ RANDENIYA
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER