West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority
Statement of Assurance 2014 - 2015

Published April 2016

Prevention   Protection   Response

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To follow

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Finance

All public bodies are responsible for ensuring that their business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards and that public money is properly accounted for and spent in a value for money way.

It is a statutory requirement under the Accounts and Audit Regulations (England) 2011 (updated 2015) for public bodies to publish the financial results of their activities for the year. This document, which is called the Statement of Accounts shows the annual cost of providing West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority and is available on our website. Alternatively, the accounts can be viewed in summary format - Summary of Accounts. The statement of accounts is published in September of each year following approval by the Fire Authority. The Authority is composed of 27 members, all of whom are councillors elected to one of the seven constituent district councils within West Midlands.

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority's 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 Audit of Accounts.

The Authority's external audit work is undertaken by Grant Thornton UK LLP a private audit practice who were awarded a 5 year contract from 2012-13 following a tendering process. The full external audit work programme and the risk based approach to its determination are explained in the external auditor's Audit Plan.
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. This is known as the value for money conclusion.

This assessment is undertaken against two criteria set out in the external audit plan.
The audit plan is approved and it's performance monitored by the Authority's Audit Committee.

Finance

The external auditor will report their findings and provide their opinion on the Authority's accounts and the value for money conclusion to the Fire Authority in September of each year. This information is detailed within the external auditors Audit Findings Report and will be laid out in the Authority's Statement of Accounts (Independent Auditor's Report). As a result of the external audit work in 2013/14, there were no matters arising that required the authority to implement an action plan for improvement.

The external auditor has produced the Annual Audit Letter which summarises the outcomes arising from the audit of the Authority. This document is available on the Service's website and confirms that the external auditor issued:

- an unqualified opinion on the accounts which give a true and fair view of the Authority's financial position as at financial year end and its income and expenditure for the year;
- an unqualified conclusion in respect of the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources;
- an unqualified opinion on the authority's Whole of Government Accounts submission.

Governance

The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011 requires Authorities to prepare an annual governance statement in support of 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.

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values by which the Authority is directed and controlled, 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 of those risks being realised, the impact should they be realised and to manage them in an efficient, effective and economic manner.

The Authority's Annual Governance Statement, which is approved by the Authority's Audit Committee in June of each year, and is included within the published statement of accounts, sets out in detail the purpose of the governance framework and the key elements of the systems and processes that make it up.

Review of the Governance Framework

The key elements of the systems and processes that comprise the Authority's governance arrangements include the following:

The Authority has an agreed Constitution which sets out how the Authority operates, how decisions are made and the procedures that are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local citizens. The Authority facilitates policy and decision-making via regular Policy Planning Forums and Authority and Executive Committee meetings. An Audit Committee provides independent assurance to the Authority on risk management and internal control, and the effectiveness of the arrangements the Authority has for these matters. The Authority reviews its governance arrangements including its Committees and their terms of reference annually.

The Authority has a Corporate Strategy (The Plan) setting out its objectives and there is quarterly performance monitoring in which achievement of the Authority's objectives are measured and monitored by the Scrutiny Committee.

The Authority has established clear channels of communication with the community and stakeholders regarding the production of the Annual Report and consultation on the key priorities of the Service, encouraging open communication.

The Authority ensures compliance with established strategies, procedures, laws and regulations – including risk management. The Authority also maintains and reviews regularly its Code of Conduct and Whistle Blowing Policy. There is a comprehensive induction and Member Development Strategy in place and information regarding strategies and procedures are held on the intranet. The Authority has a strong Internal Audit function and has established protocols for working with External Audit.

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority will continue to enhance and strengthen its internal control environment through regular review of current policies and procedures.
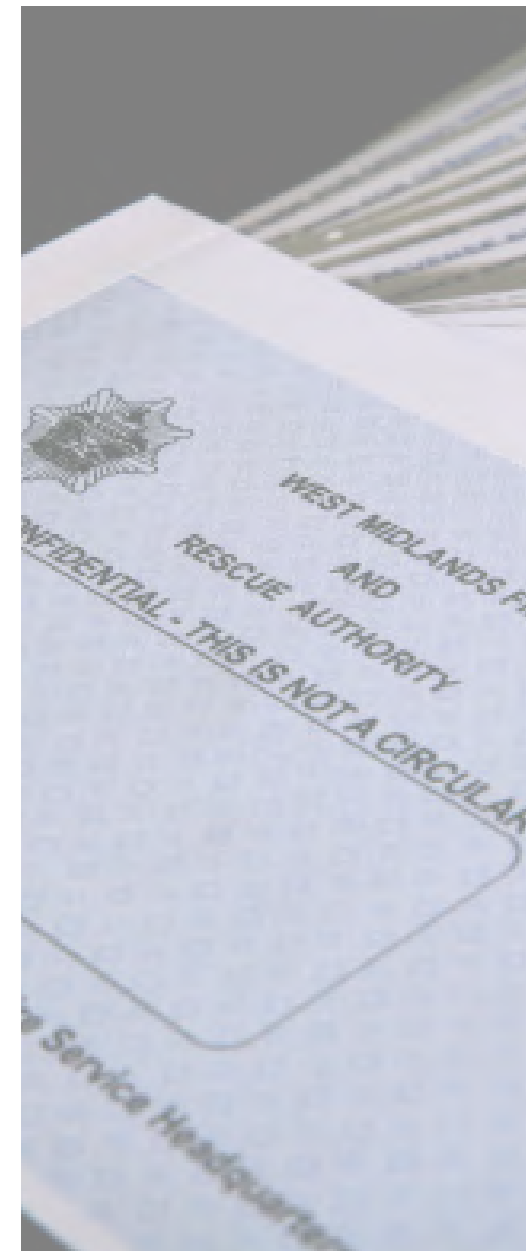
Review of the Governance Framework
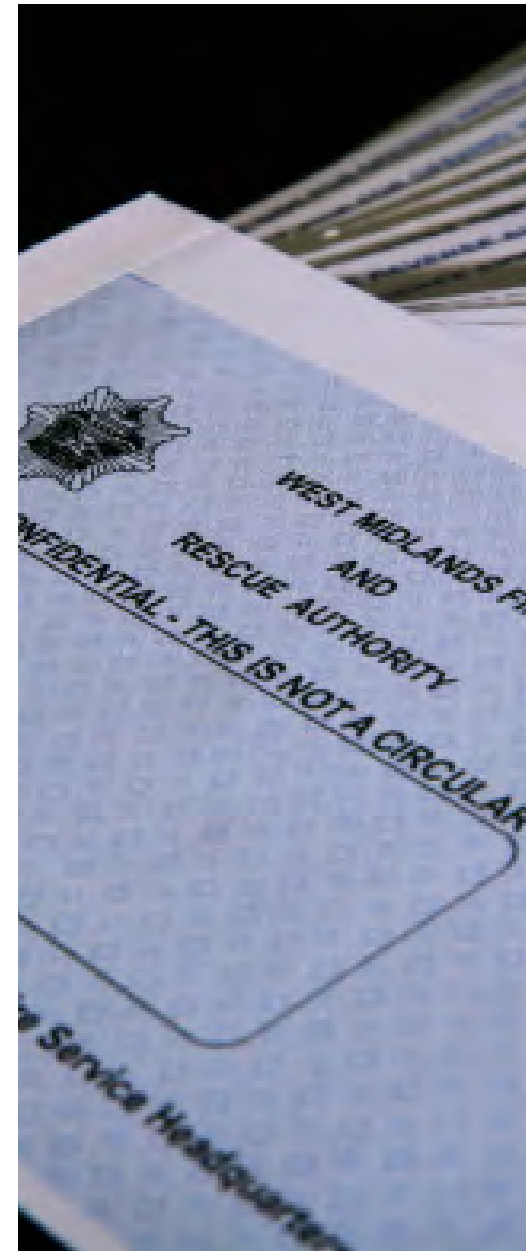
The Authority has corporate risk management arrangements in place which are supported by an approved Risk Management Strategy, enabling managers and other senior officers to identify, assess and prioritise risks within their own work areas which impact on the ability of the Authority and its services to meet objectives. To consider the effectiveness of the Authority's risk management arrangements is a specific term of reference for the Audit Committee and risk management is a specific responsibility of both the Chair and Vice Chair.

The Authority's Corporate Risk Assurance Map Summary identifies the principal risks to the achievement of the Authority's objectives and assesses the nature and extent of those risks (through assessment of impact and likelihood). The Assurance Map identifies risk owners whose responsibility includes the identification of controls and actions to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically. Corporate Risk matters are discussed with the Audit Committee on a quarterly basis.

The Authority ensures the economical, effective and efficient use of resources, and secures continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, by having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness as required by the Best Value duty. The Authority plans its spending on an established planning cycle for policy development, budget setting and performance management through its business planning process. This ensures that resources are aligned to priorities and secures best value from the resources that are available.

The Authority's financial system is an ORACLE based general ledger and management information system, which integrates the general ledger function with those of budgetary control and payments. Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules are approved and regularly reviewed by the Authority. A rigorous system of monthly financial monitoring by the Strategic Enabling Team ensures that any significant budget variances are identified in a timely way, and corrective action initiated. Performance is reported to Authority on a quarterly frequency.

The Authority's performance management and reporting of performance management continues to be improved with a more focused Corporate Strategy, and setting of priorities supported by regular performance monitoring. Corporate performance is reported on a quarterly basis to senior managers via the Quarterly

Performance Review framework and to Members through Scrutiny Committee.
The Report sets out our achievements and demonstrates our performance in delivering our key priorities, strategic objectives and outcomes during the previous financial year.

The Authority has a Standards Committee which promotes high ethical standards amongst Members. This Standards Committee leads on developing policies and procedures to accompany the revised Code of Conduct for Members and is responsible for local assessment and review of complaints about members' conduct.

The Authority has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the statutory officers and principal managers of the Authority who have 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 Treasurer is responsible for ensuring that there is an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the Authority's accounting and other systems of internal control as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulation. The internal audit provision operates in accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government. The arrangements for the provision of internal audit are contained within section 3 of the Authority's Financial Regulations. The purpose of internal audit is to provide the Authority with an independent and objective opinion on risk management, control and governance and their effectiveness in achieving the Authority's agreed objectives

In order to achieve this, the Internal Audit Strategy and Plan has been developed. The strategy sets out the internal audit work to be undertaken on a rolling three year basis and includes a detailed annual internal audit plan for the current fiscal year. This work is prioritised by a combination of the key internal controls, assessment and review on the basis of risk and the Authority's corporate governance arrangements, including risk management. Provision is made within the internal audit strategy to audit aspects of the Authority's governance and risk management arrangements on an annual basis. The work is further supplemented by reviews around the main
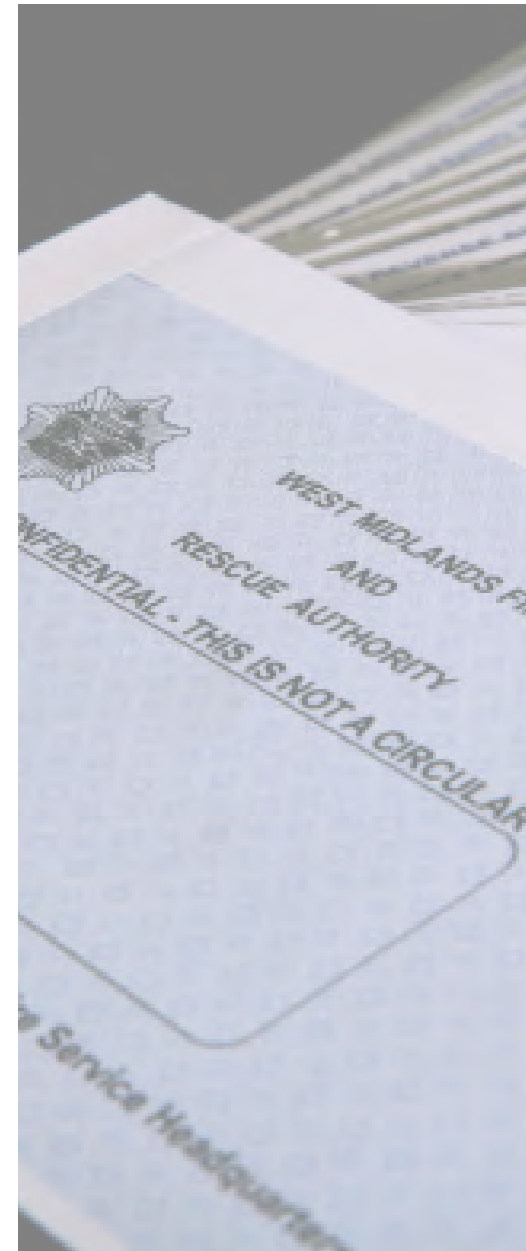
financial systems, scheduled visits to Authority establishments, fraud investigations and counter-fraud activity including training for managers. The Authority has in place an Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy.

The internal audit strategy is discussed and agreed with Principal Officers and the Audit Committee, and shared with the Authority's external auditor. Meetings between the internal and external auditor ensure that duplication of effort is avoided. All Authority internal audit reports include an assessment of the adequacy of internal control and prioritised action plans to address any areas needing improvement.

The Authority's review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control is informed by:

• The work undertaken by Internal Audit during the year reported in the Annual Internal Audit Report;
• The work undertaken by the external auditor reported in their Annual Audit Letter; and
• Other work undertaken by independent inspection bodies.

In fulfilling the internal audit plan, quarterly reports will be provided to the Authority's Audit Committee detailing matters arising from internal audit work undertaken within the audit year. The purpose of these reports is to bring the Audit Committee up to date with progress made. The information included in progress reports informs the end of year Internal Audit Annual Report. This report provides an opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Authority's governance, risk management and internal control processes.

Based on the work undertaken during the year and the implementation by management of the recommendations made, internal audit has provided reasonable assurance that the Fire Authority has adequate and effective governance, risk management and internal control processes. This is an unqualified opinion and the highest level of assurance available to the internal audit function. The most that internal audit can provide is reasonable assurance that there are no major weaknesses in the Authority's governance, risk management and control processes.

In order to provide assurance of the high quality of the work of the internal audit service, an annual Review of Effectiveness of Internal Audit is undertaken, the findings of which are approved by the Audit Committee.

Review of the Governance Framework
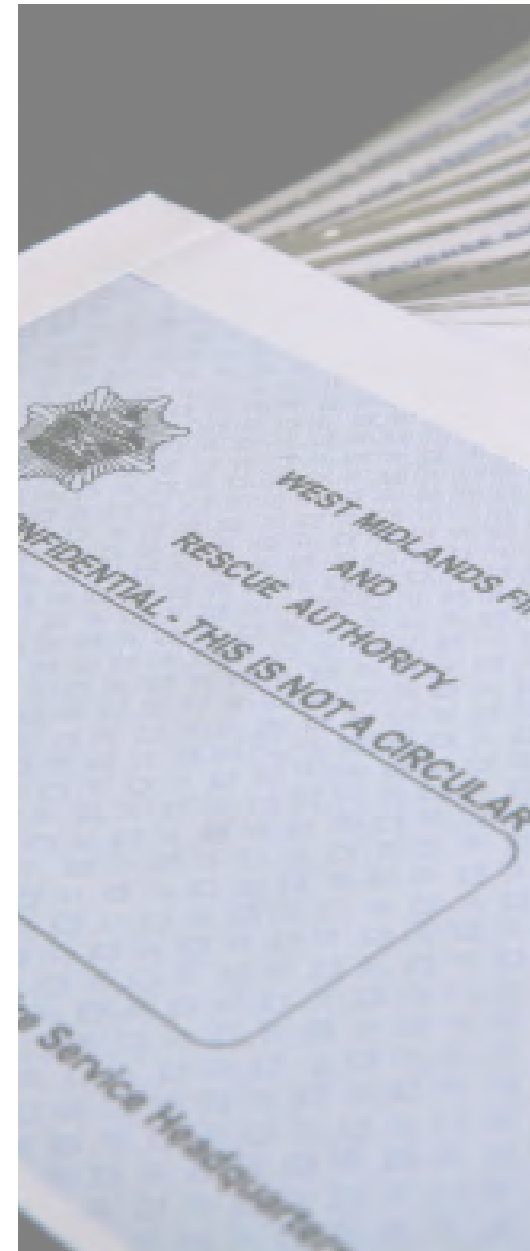
The Audit Committee undertakes an annual self assessment / review of its effectiveness using the industry standard toolkit. This year's review highlighted that the Committee was operating within a recognised best practice framework. The Audit Committee is required to produce an Annual Report. This report 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 Audit Committee is derived from, and informed by, the work of internal audit and the compilation of the Annual Governance Statement. As a consequence of this work the Audit Committee was able to confirm:

'That the system of internal control, governance and risk management in the authority was adequate in identifying risks and allowing the 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 as set out in the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency and is mindful that greater transparency is at the heart of enabling the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account. Where public money is spent is a matter of public interest. The information provided in the links below, provides additional information on how the Authority has spent its public money and further demonstrates the Authority's commitment to transparency and accountability.
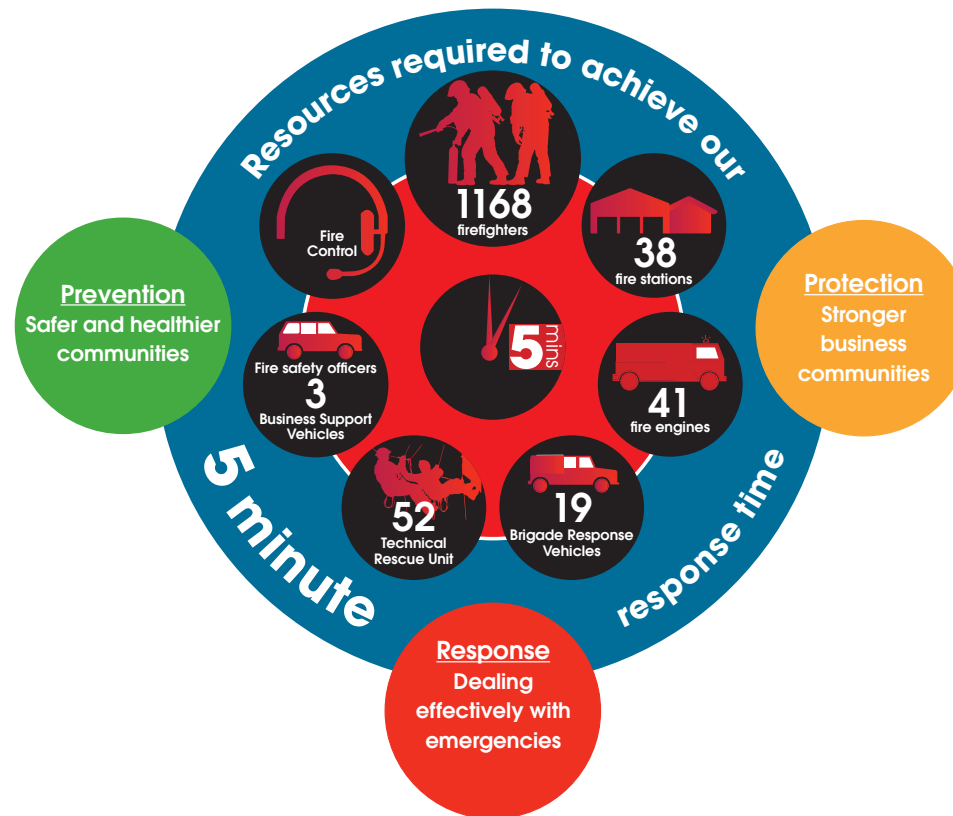
• Contracts information & expenditure over £500
• Salary information
• Pay Policy Statement
• Member allowances scheme   – (Appendix 5 of the link) and Member allowances
• The location of land and building assets
• Counter Fraud Infromation
• The democratic running of the Authority including The Constitution, committee minutes, decision making processes and records of decisions are maintained on our website via the Committee Management Information System (CMIS)

In supporting the transparency agenda, the Authority is compliant with its responsibility set out in the Local Government Transparency Code 2015.

The Fire Authority meets the requirements set out in the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004, Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) 2007, Localism Act 2011 and the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. All Fire and Rescue Authorities are required to produce and publish an integrated risk management plan. The Authority's integrated risk management plan is called the Community Safety Strategy and sets out how we will keep people of the West Midlands safe through our Service Delivery Model.

The Community Safety Strategy contains our analysis of fire and rescue related risks in the West Midlands. It shows how we will target our restricted resources so that we can prevent incidents from happening, while also making sure they are located to best protect the community therefore enabling us to continue providing the highest standards of service in the areas of prevention, protection and emergency response through our Service Delivery Model.

Our Community Safety Strategy is the foundation on which we build our Service Delivery Model which is set out here:

Resources required to achieve our 5 minute response time

Fire Control

1168 firefighters

38 fire stations

Fire safety officers **3** Business Support Vehicles

5 mins

41 fire engines

52 Technical Rescue Unit

19 Brigade Response Vehicles

Prevention
Safer and healthier communities

Protection
Stronger business communities

Response
Dealing effectively with emergencies

2016 Service Delivery Model illustrated here.

Picture: © John Tuckey

Operational

The Community Safety Strategy is integral to informing and shaping our key priorities, desired outcomes, Service Delivery Model and corporate objectives as set out in The Plan. The Authority last consulted on the Community Safety Strategy in 2013. Over the last 12 months the West Midlands Fire Service has been working to produce an online, interactive community safety strategy which is due to go live between April 2016 and April 2017. This online tool will enable individuals to view information contained within the Community Safety Strategy which is relevant to their geographical area (by postcode), making it more personal and tailored to the individual. An engagement exercise was held in headquarters during the development stage of the interactive Community Safety Strategy with a range of stakeholders including employees, safeside volunteers and community members being invited to attend. These focus groups were structured to enable West Midlands Fire Service to capture the perceptions, opinions and attitudes towards the future approach we will be taking to communicating the Community Safety Strategy to the public. The results from this engagement was fed back to the developers and amendments made to further improve the tools function prior to release in 2016. Over the next 12 months the tool will be evaluated with a view to evolving it in future years.

In accordance with Section 13 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, arrangements are in place to give mutual assistance to neighbouring Fire Authorities due to a lack of available resources in a geographical area in the event of large-scale incidents, or where the resources of the recipient authority are seriously reduced. Similarly, the Authority has reciprocal arrangements in place to receive assistance from neighbouring Authorities when required.

Agreements can be made with other Fire Authorities in accordance with Section 16 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 in respect of calls received from outside the West Midlands border. These agreements 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, known as Section 16 areas in the event of an emergency call being received.

WMFS has mutual assistance arrangements with all Fire and Rescue Services surrounding the West Midlands (Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Services.)
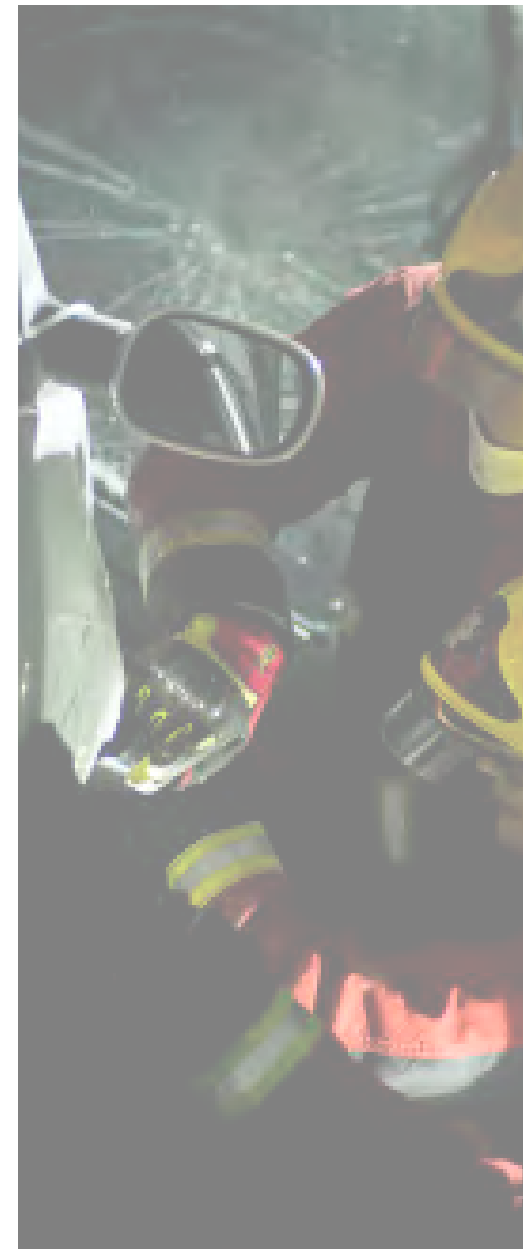
In order to meet our specific responsibilites under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the Authority is a partner in the multi agency West Midlands Conurbation Local Resilience Forum (LRF). This forum brings together local responders, as well as partners in the military and voluntary sectors, to plan and prepare for localised incidents and catastrophic emergencies. The work of the LRF is enabled through the General Working Group (GWG) which is chaired by West Midlands Fire Service and involves members from all the agencies who attend the LRF. At local level, each Local Authority has a Local Resilience Group (LRG). Station and Operations Commanders are engaged with these in partnership with their local colleagues in other services.

In support of National Resilience we have enhanced our capability to repond to major emergencies such as terrorist attacks, industrial and domestic accidents and natural disasters. We are a partner in the Multi Agency Initial Assessment Team (MAIAT) which provides an initial assessment of potential chemical, biological, radiological, Nuclear or Explosive (CBRNE) incidents.

Each of the UK's emergency services works to keep our country safe and secure as well a protecting their communities. This means that we work together at major incidents and emergencies on an ever increasing basis. The introduction of the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP) provides the pathway as to how emergency services can work together more effectively. We also run the regional arrangements for the National Inter-Agency Liaison Officer cadre (NILO) which supports cross Blue Light organisational information sharing to support complex incident resolution.

A major incident can be thought of as an emergency arising with or without warning. It can threaten or cause death, injury or serious disruption to a significant number of people, property or the environment. It may require the implementation of specialist arrangements and response teams.

When police, fire and ambulance services respond to major incidents, along with other agencies, each organisation brings their own expertise to that situation. This programme will help the emergency services better understand each other's expertise and ways of working so they can improve how they can jointly deal with an emergency. The clarity that JESIP will bring to a major emergency scene will enable for the better integration and more efficient and effective management of such incidents.

Through our fire protection work we assist businesses to comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. 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. Our protection measures evidence our performance.

The West Midlands Fire Service strives for a commitment to excellence through a framework of learning and development defined by a culture of personal accountability.

Our "Emergency Response Cycle" breaks down the key elements that underpin this learning and development framework leading to assertive, safe and effective firefighting and excellent emergency response. The response cycle complements our commitment to HSG 65 and defines a simple but effective approach to Plan-Do-Check-Act. It starts with our people being highly skilled with our equipment, policy and procedures (acquisition of skills), with the cycle then moving through to the emergency response phase (application and maintenance of competence). We use reflective learning and direct observation of performance to look for both areas of excellence and improvement through our debrief and operational intelligence policy. The outcomes of this learning then directly impacts on continuous improvement influencing changes in policy, procedure and people leading to even safer firefighters delivering an even greater service.

THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE CYCLE

IRM

2016 Emergency Response Cycle illustrated here.
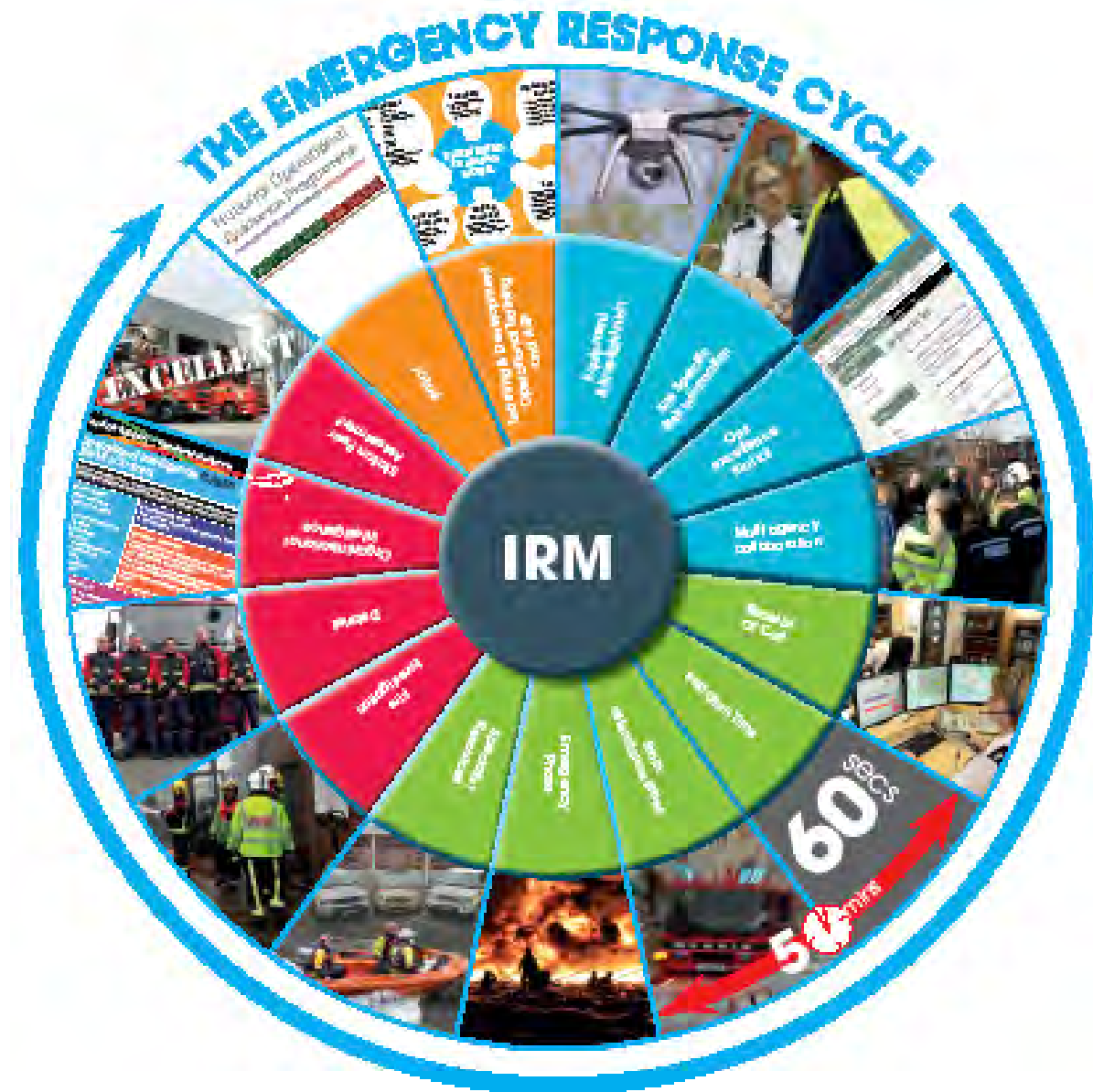
Future Improvements

A great deal of progress has already been made, in the drive to adopt an intelligence-led approach to risk management and the allocation of resources based on the outcomes of data and risk analysis. The future, whilst posing a number of challenges in terms of financial constraints arising from the ongoing funding reduction, will see WMFS continuing to innovate and adopt increasingly flexible and creative ways to provide the highest standards of service delivery.

New vehicle types are being deployed, with state of the art equipment and technology, so that fast response times can be maintained with fewer firefighters.

Staffing systems have been refined, so that specialist vehicles are now crewed only when required to respond to emergencies and other ways of managing our workforce as efficiently as possible at the local level, are being developed and enhanced.

Our stations and other building assets are being reviewed, with a view to maximising efficiencies in their distribution and combining some stations where possible, to streamline local resources. Additionally, we are continuing to challenge some calls received by our Fire Control centre, to minimise the number of false alarms responded to and to ensure we always have sufficient resources to mobilise most effectively to the calls where lives and property are in danger.

Working with Staffordshire FRS we have combined the Fire Control function of the two services, reaping financial savings in the process, whilst improving the level of operational collaboration and inter-agency working within our region.

At the same time, we are actively engaging in productive partnerships and sharing data with key agencies to accurately target our preventative and educational activities, in the drive to moderate and improve behaviours in those most vulnerable from fire and other emergencies.

Future Improvements

Our service delivery model blends our prevention, protection and response activity to reduce the effects and the number of emergency incidents. We have seen the benefits of our core delivery areas working together on many occasions in the past and we recognise the time is right to encourage further integration in a more co-ordinated way. This is the aim of the prevention, protection and response integration work stream.

We are striving to work together more closely as 'one team' for the benefit of the community. So, where prevention is currently delivered by firefighters we believe that by providing the right training and support to our fire safety team, they will be able to support our prevention priorities. It could be that they are carrying out an inspection at a business premises and they 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. In future, through closer working arrangements, we believe that our frontline crews will be able to offer appropriate advice.

Finally, as we aim to do all we can to achieve our risk based five minute attendance time we believe that we can provide resilience to our response teams through utilising fire safety officers to provide operational cover when appropriate. There will be other benefits to operating as one team including sharing information, joint training and closer relationships – all contributing to Making West Midlands Safer.