

# **WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

**5 OCTOBER 2020**

## **1. PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT (3PT)**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

RECOMMENDED

THAT the contents of the report be noted.

## **2. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 2.1 This report provides a Strategic summary on the progress of delivery of value through 'Our Plan' based on the continual assessment of Investment and Value release within the three Programmes of People, Process and Culture enabling progression of the Portfolio Management to be tracked.
- 2.2 To inform Members of the approach taken under Portfolio Management and the resulting outcomes of the work streams within current Projects and Programmes, which support the effective leadership of the Service in continual improvement.
- 2.3 This report will lead into the subsequent West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA) reports that support the delivery of the Strategy in one or more of the Programmes.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

### **3.1 COVID-19 Response/Recovery - Project Methodology**

- 3.2 The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the COVID-19 (also known as Coronavirus) outbreak a pandemic on 11 March 2020. Following the announcement, a notification of a major incident was declared across the West Midlands and Warwickshire by West Midlands Police (Thursday, 19th March 2020).

- 3.3 As a result, during the pandemic, the organisational expectation was that normal 3PT projects were paused. The decision to pause 3PT was made due to there not being any reporting/scrutiny of projects throughout the COVID response period as focus and priority of functional leads, Managers and Officers was given to one single C-19 Business Continuity (BC) Project.

The objective of the new project was set out to measure success and progress against the 4 strategic outcomes. The project allowed 3PT to be adapted to support BC and effectively manage, monitor and control on-going progression of activities linked to the COVID response. Throughout the pandemic the Business Continuity Management Team (BCMT) managed the progress of the project along with support from the Business Continuity Planning Team (BCPT).

- 3.4 The 3PT pause allowed the opportunity for Project Managers and teams to look at prioritising workstreams which feed into 'Our Plan' with alignment to the organisation's 'New Normal' strategic outcomes.
- 3.5 The decision to re-introduce 3PT in the Autumn of 2020 has been made following the COVID alert level changes. With the current level now at 3 we feel we should be moving from response to recovery mode. This will be achieved by continuing to work in an agile environment recognising the constant changes in government control measures. Keeping Target dates flexible and regularly reviewed.
- 3.6 To assist with the recovery, a framework has been produced and is outlined through a 3PT Roadmap. The roadmap is using a phased approach to the recovery of 3PT and monitoring any movement in COVID alert levels. This will be done using a scaleable approach which can be adapted depending on the direction of travel and impact of COVID. Also, determining which priorities if any could be maintained within a COVID response state.
- 3.7 To support an efficient and effective recovery, a decision was made to align our recovery to a Best Practice recovery document which was produced by the NFCC Business Continuity group. The document recommends an approach to assessing projects through Key Principles based on a 5S (Scan, Speed Up, Slow Down, Start, Stop) model.

\*\* At the time of writing the report the COVID alert level changed between level 3 to 4 therefore some of the information stated may be subject to change.

## 4. COVID-19 PROJECT UPDATE

### 4.1 Response and Staffing

The preparation and enhancement of our existing Business Continuity Plans (BCP) was based on the predicted 'reasonable worst case' scenario as advised through the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) and other forums within which we were key partners as the COVID situation was developing.

The 'reasonable worst case' scenario had the potential to create unprecedented pressure upon our Service Delivery Model (SDM) and Fire Control function through the sheer quantity of illness and associated absence caused by the virus. The Fire Authority will be aware that Officers had developed robust BCPs to manage the risks and impact of an influenza pandemic and mitigate the associated corporate risk.

The BCMT quickly established a local Scientific Cell made up of medical and scientific professionals who advised Officers on the most effective mitigation and control measures to support guidance for staff that was critical in limiting the spread of the virus. This was enabled through regular briefings to all staff and middle managers which allowed an organisational understanding of the evolving situation and control measures.

We made a firm commitment to the strategic outcome to '**support and inform the health and wellbeing of our staff**'. This was an appreciative approach aimed at ensuring that all staff could be confident that there would not be any personal impact on them should they be absent from work for reasons related to COVID-19. A range of supportive information and guidance was available through the Covid-19 all staff MESH site with a specific focus on you, your team and your family and support and Wellbeing.

In support of all staff bespoke Wellbeing activities were provided to include:

- twice a week, for an hour, all employees had access to a psychotherapist who educated employees to understand how they were feeling and how they can build resilience.
- mindfulness sessions - those wishing to take it further were offered the standard 8-week course.
- question and answer Occupational Health sessions.
- a partnership was introduced with Able Futures to give employees 9-month mental health support to keep them in work.
- wellbeing communications and exercise classes available for home workers. An external COVID OH helpline was provided in addition to the normal OH provision.

This strategic outcome also supported our decision to enable staff to continue to take their pre-existing annual leave (particularly if holidays had been booked) outside of our normal policy arrangements.

## Approach

In aligning the BCP to a BRAG (Blue, Red, Amber, Green) Risk Rating and agreeing the measures that would need to be taken at each rating, we had a high degree of confidence in being able to manage the pandemic situation.

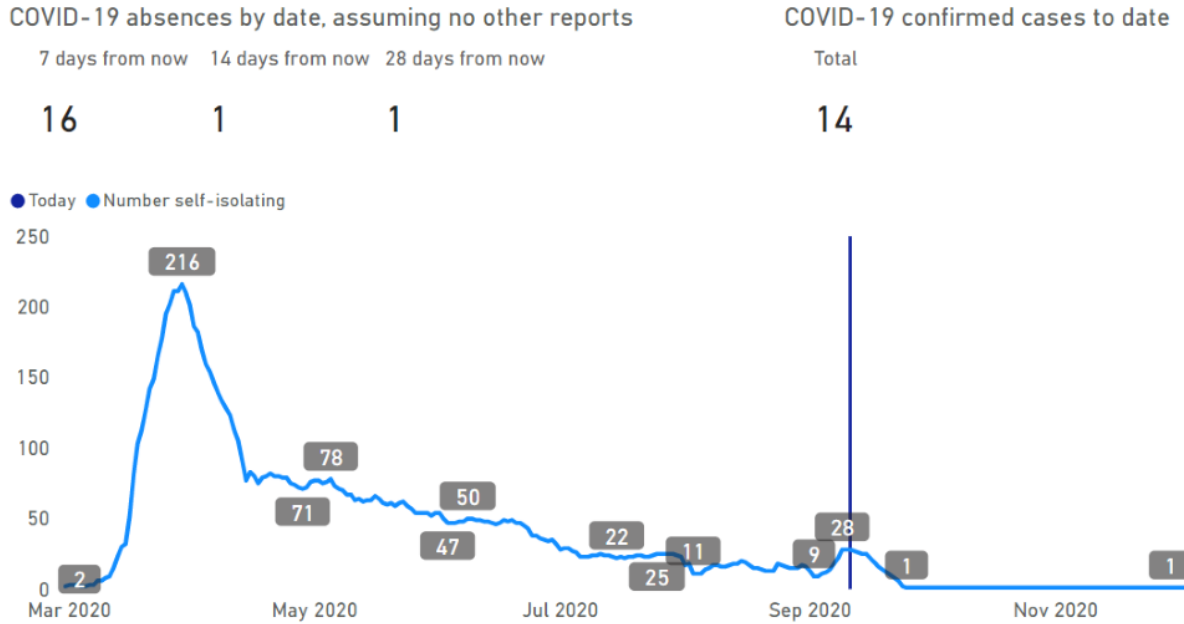
The required measures were incremental dependent upon the significance of the impact. As an example, if we moved from a 'Green' status to an 'Amber' status we would have considered utilising Flexi Duty Officers to support staffing resilience alongside a voluntary request for people to consider rearranging their annual leave.

We ensured we were able to assess the ongoing impact in 'real-time' using a COVID-19 Data Dashboard (**Fig. 1 below**) which showed the exact numbers of staff absent from work at any time alongside the reasons and their predicted return date. This meant we were able to accurately understand and plan for the introduction of any mitigating actions immediately.

We have not currently moved outside of Green status in relation to staffing for the duration of the pandemic and **Table 1** below demonstrates the level of fleet availability from April-August 2020 against an average of 94% for the previous financial year (2019). This has also translated into a maintenance of Risk Based Attendance

Standards across the same period as show in Table 2 below. During the period the overall performance to attendance times to High Risk incidents was 4:30.

**Fig. 1 - Attendance dashboard screenshot**



**Table 1 – Fleet Availability**

Month	Fleet Availability
Apr-20	93.6%
May-20	94.3%
Jun -20	93.9%
Jul -20	93.8%
Aug -20	92.3%
<b>YTD Average</b>	<b>93.5%</b>
<b>2019 Average</b>	<b>94.0%</b>

**Table 2 – Risk Based Attendance Standards**

<b>Risk Based Attendance Standards</b>	<b>Performance April-August</b>
<b>Cat 1 - 5 min</b>	270
<b>Cat 2 - 7 min</b>	309
<b>Cat 3 - 10 min</b>	280
<b>Cat 4 - 20 min</b>	380

### **Voluntary Additional Shifts**

The flexibility of our well-established Voluntary Additional Shifts (VAS) arrangements was central to our ability to maintain the SDM. The fact that we had a tried and tested system to bring additional people into work, coupled with the desire of our staff to do all they could to support the Service and the community, was hugely beneficial.

The VAS shifts are cost effective as they are paid at plain rate with a 25% additional payment made as a disturbance allowance based on the short-term nature of the requests. VAS remained our primary approach to ensuring high levels of fleet availability and maintenance of our emergency response standards throughout the pandemic and for 'backfilling' station-based staff who were volunteering for COVID related support activities.

The use of VAS throughout the pandemic has resulted in additional spend of circa £680k to the end of August 2020 which has been supported through the COVID specific Government grant.

### **Ridership Factor**

The ridership factor is a term used to describe and monitor the reasons operational staff are not at work excluding periods of annual leave.

During the main phase of the pandemic in April, May, June and July a further supporting factor in managing the situation was a significant reduction in the non-COVID related absences. Throughout this period this reduced from 15 days per person to an all-time low of 10.9 days per person; going some way to offsetting the absence related to COVID itself.

Further analysis is being undertaken to fully understand this, but it has been recognised that the commitment of the staff to enable this to happen is commendable.

## **4.2 Protection**

From the initiation of BCMT and consistent with all other activities, the safety and welfare of all Fire Safety Officers has been a priority. Since the early stages of COVID, the Protection team have led the way and supported the NFCC in providing guidance to support staff to carry out Protection activities safely both during lockdown and as the restrictions have been lifted.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Protection team produced their own COVID scheduler allowing activity in the Protection areas to continue, by carrying out remote desk top audits over the telephone and using video technology (999EYE). Despite the COVID risk, Protection staff, where the risk to life was high, would still carry out a high-risk audit and two properties were issued with a Prohibition notice during the COVID period.

WMFS were also instrumental in the opening of the Nightingale Hospital and Birmingham Airport Mortuary providing advice and guidance to the Local Authority to ensure it was ready for use, if needed, within a matter of days.

As the government guidance changes WMFS have been agile and adapted its guidance to allow visits to high risk and high life risk businesses as the restaurants and commercial businesses reopened. This was important as new restrictions are in place impacting on community safety.

In consultation with Representative Bodies the Protection team enhanced their capacity and capability and introduced a new Out of Hours Protection response procedure during this period, with 6

Officers now responding between 18:00 and 08:00 for a 12-month trial period.

The Protection team continues to develop and adjust its strategy where necessary including reacting to local lockdown to protect the community and its staff.

### **Grenfell Tower and Tall Buildings Assurance**

Following the tragic events of Grenfell Tower, the NFCC established its Protection Board in 2019 to support and coordinate the sectors response to Phase 1 Inquiry and the assessment of building risk in relation to Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) cladding was concluded. In 2020, the Home Office provided grant funding to the UK FRS through several different funding streams in recognition of the critical nature of this work; WMFS was allocated £901k with grant conditions and reporting time scales attached.

Fire safety audits have commenced in high rise residential buildings to ensure that they comply with the Fire Safety Order and at the same time collecting information for the Home Office, such as type of cladding systems. To ensure our Protection staff are targeting the most high-risk premises we continue to invest and develop our Risk Based Inspection Programme to include Site Specific Risk Information. The outcomes of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 are being delivered and fire escape hoods have been procured and recently gone live, seeing their first use at an operational incident (non-high rise) where two people were [rescued](#).

### **4.3 Prevention**

Since the initiation of BCMT the safety and welfare of WMFS staff has been a priority. In the early stages of COVID the prevention business continuity arrangements were designed to protect the frontline Service Delivery Model (SDM) and Fire Control from the worst predicted impact of high levels staff absence caused by the virus.

#### **Safe and Well Visits (SAW) and Complex Needs Officers**

Safe and Well activity was scaled back to the position with face-to-face visits only taking place in households where: COVID was not



present and no one in the household was shielding; and, the household had a high risk of fire and vulnerability. Overall, this resulted in severely reduced number of visits being conducted. Through this approach, we sought to protect staff and the community from local transmission of the virus whilst continuing to provide a service to the most vulnerable.

Early on in lockdown the decision was made to pause the Tymly SAW pilot in Black Country South Command. The pilot involves mobilising crews to SAW visits, so the decision was made based on the need to both protect Fire Control capacity and station based staff.

Where it is not possible to conduct a face-to-face SAW visit, crews are expected to carry out a "Remote SAW" over the phone. The plan is to return to all households that have had a Remote SAW with a face-to-face visit when the COVID restrictions allow.

During this period, we have worked with ICT to create a form within the Tymly platform to record Remote SAW visits. This has not yet been released.

A system of Remote SAW has been developed that could be fully delivered by support staff if necessary. This involved carrying out a visit remotely over the phone utilising the 999eye capability to get a video feed from the household. This system is fully developed but was not implemented when it became apparent that the impact of staff absence was manageable, but the system is ready if business continuity requires it.

Complex Needs Officer (CNO) activity has continued during this period, but it has been prioritised based on risk and vulnerability with Covid-19 guidance in place.

### Partnership Activity

#### Partnerships and Vulnerability Team

The number of referrals from partners began to decrease at the start of lockdown in March as partner agencies focussed on their own responses to the pandemic.

The Partnerships and Vulnerability Team have taken the opportunity

to work with Command Prevention Leads and the Home Safety Centre to improve the quality of information recorded in SAW workbook referrals and develop a coordinated and consistent approach for building and maintaining relationships with key partners to generate SAW referrals.

The purpose of this is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of performance against PI5 (% SAWs that result from a referral from a partner) and the targeting of partners whose service users make up the PI2 and PI3 cohort (accidental dwelling fires and injuries including deaths from accidental dwelling fires respectively), as referrals increase and we continue to increase the engagement we have.

### Education and Youth Activities

In order to protect frontline capacity, and driven by COVID restrictions, all education and youth activities have been paused during this period including:

- Safeside closed
- crews no longer carry out SPARKs visits in schools
- road safety education ceased
- Fire Cadets closed
- Fire Safety Tutoring only to the most high-risk cases with Covid-19 guidance in place
- Teamworx ceases
- use of WMFS community space ceases

Now we are in the new academic year and schools have returned plans are in place to deliver services in innovative ways that take account of the current limitations.

Schools are not currently planning trips, so Safeside will be live-streaming programmes from the safety village into the classroom. The technology enables there to be interaction between Safeside and the classroom with minimal connectivity issues.

The technology being utilised is new to the Organisation and could be beneficial in other parts of the business, including for incident management.

Because of the limitations on people going into schools SPARKs visits will be delivered by crews from the station Surface Hub.

Access to Stations and lockdown restrictions meant that Fire Cadet branches were closed. During this period Cadet Instructors and the Children and Young People team have kept contact with Cadets and have run poetry and art competitions to keep cadets engaged. The plan is to resume cadet activity after the October half term taking account of any restrictions that apply.

Road Safety Education activity ceased during lockdown as educational and community venues were closed. As venues start to re-open activities have started but are limited to remote delivery via video conferencing.

Fire Safety Tutoring has continued with some face-to-face delivery for the most vulnerable and high-risk cases. In these situations, COVID guidance has been in place and all activity has been socially distanced to protect the staff and clients. Where possible video conferencing has been utilised

### Fire Investigation

Fire Investigation and Prevention Section (FIPS) have continued to deliver service as normal with the provision of Tier 2 Fire Investigation to both West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) with the team predominantly working and mobilised from home.

Although slow during the COVID lockdown, the team are maintaining the work towards WMFS ISO accreditation to ensure we can continue to attend and investigate crime scenes.

Working with our Partners RiVR the Virtual Reality (VR) Fire Investigation training facility has been purchased and is now set up with numerous scenarios – this is able to be mobile and transported to different locations to enable FIPS to deliver training and assessments in each command area.

The VR training and assessments alongside development plans for all supervisory officers will be implemented as soon as COVID restrictions are relaxed. The development of our supervisory officers in fire investigation is an NFCC requirement.

During this period the team have been working with Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) which, due to our national and international reputation and the successful partnership with Staffordshire FRS, has led to RBFRS officially requesting that WMFS provide Tier 2 Fire Investigation to RBFRS. Any additional income received would be utilised to invest in a FIPS development post to ensure succession planning for the team.

### HQ Prevention Team

A review of the Prevention Team based at HQ was started in January 2020 with a business case being submitted and consultation with staff started before lockdown. This review continued during the period of business continuity with consultation continuing using video conferencing. The consultation was concluded, and the business case went back to JCC in June for sign off. Since then the proposals have been implemented including:

- establishment of Evaluation and Quality Assurance function within the Prevention Team
- establishment of the Support Team for Education and Prevention (STEP) Team by bringing together the current education, volunteer development, RCRT and CYP roles within the existing team under a new functional group.
- refocus of the 2 Business Partner Adult roles and moving them to become part of the renamed Partnerships and Vulnerability Support Team
- minor revisions to all Job Summaries to bring them up to date

### Volunteering

During lockdown all the existing volunteering opportunities ceased. Some WMFS volunteers took the opportunity to support the Additional Activities and participated in making deliveries of food and medicines alongside WMFS staff. This was a positive experience for the volunteers involved and provided additional capacity for the activities.

## **4.4 New Activities**

In meeting the challenge presented by this unprecedented national

crisis Fire and Rescue Services' (FRS) recognised the requirement to support Local Authorities, NHS and Ambulance Trusts, Police and other public service partners in the broader response to mitigation of the pandemic. This could be achieved through providing additional and new activities.

To enable those new activities to be delivered, a framework setting out several principles to support any delivery by FRS' was developed and agreed by The National Employers, National Fire Chiefs' Council (NFCC) and the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU) on 26 March 2020. This was referred to as The Tripartite Agreement.

Over several revisions of The Tripartite Agreement a number of additional activities were agreed which included:

- ambulance driving and patient/ambulance personnel support (not additional FRS first or co-responding)
- assisting in taking sample for Covid-19 testing (taking swab samples)
- vulnerable persons –delivery of essential items
- COVID-19 – mass casualty (movement of bodies)
- face fitting for masks to be used by frontline NHS and clinical care staff working with Covid-19 patients
- delivery of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other medical supplies to NHS and care facilities
- driving ambulance transport not on blue lights (excluding known Covid-19 patients) to outpatient appointments or to receive urgent care
- driving instruction by FRS driver trainers to deliver training for non-Service personnel to drive ambulances (not on blue lights)
- the assembly of single use face shields for the NHS and care work front line staff
- packing/repacking food supplies for vulnerable people
- known/suspected and non-Covid-19 patients: transfer to and from Nightingale hospitals under emergency response (blue light) or through non-emergency patient transfer (not on blue lights)
- delivery of training on infection control to care home staff

A virtual team of 32 WMFS personnel was formed to manage the New Activities process which included staff from across all areas of the organisation alongside all of the Representative Bodies. This Team

worked inclusively to develop agreements, guidance and risk assessments for all the activities listed above (with the exception of the transporting patients to and from the Nightingale Hospital), to ensure we were ready, willing and able to support when a request was made.

All activities were delivered by staff volunteers from across the organisation and we were inundated with support with around 900 volunteers for each activity. All activities were delivered within volunteers existing contracted hours.

Despite being prepared for the wide range of activities, there were no direct requests made for support from WMAS and preparation to enhance swab testing did not come to fruition due to a change in Government approach. Support was provided to help our partners with food and PPE packing and local requests such as transporting GPs to home appointments (Solihull). However, there was a significant contribution to the activities outlined below.

### **Body Movement/PMART**

Due to the high levels of sudden deaths from COVID there were significant pressures created on WMAS, West Midlands Police (WMP), Coroners and funeral directors. To support this a number of Pandemic Multi Agency Response Teams (PMART) were created around the country. These consisted of WMAS, WMP and WMFS staff who undertook the task of attending premises where a sudden death had occurred to make an assessment and then remove the body in a sensitive and dignified manner, prior to transportation to a mortuary. This activity was also complicated by the very nature of a COVID related death, so the highest levels of PPE (Breathing Apparatus) were required meaning that this activity was undertaken by operational staff.

Working as part of a Multi-Agency Team of 6 people, PMART commenced on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and ceased on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020. During this time, a total of 153 activities were completed.

The WMFS staff worked 12-hour shifts and received both pre and post shift support to ensure the potential emotional and psychological impact of this activity was managed to the highest degree. Following the debrief process staff and representative bodies have provided positive feedback on the way the activity was

managed along with the welfare of staff. Our approach was also shared with other FRSs in recognition of its effectiveness.

Arrangements have been made to stand this activity up again at short notice if required due to a second wave of COVID.

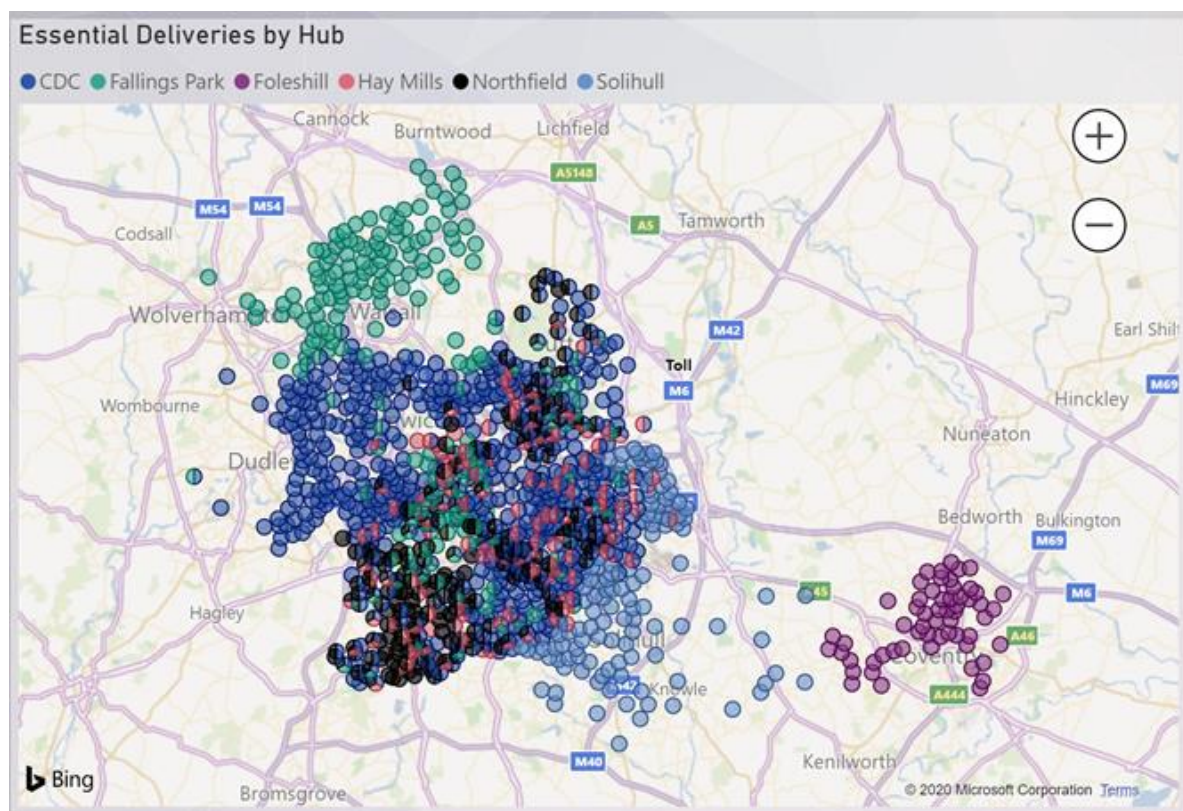
### **Essential Deliveries**

A significant number of requests were received from across all Local Authorities across the West Midlands. This provided logistical challenges resulting in 6 local delivery hubs being established across the West Midlands by 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Each hub had a single point of contact (SPOC) who liaised with partners to coordinate the deliveries. The deliveries were then made using the large number of volunteers, who worked in pairs, using WMFS vehicles and loaner vehicles from Jaguar Land Rover (JLR).

As at 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020, a total number of 7,101 deliveries had been made by WMFS. 4,380 on food deliveries, 413 medical supplies, 2,366 no-contact letters (58 of the deliveries contained a combination of items, these are only counted once in total deliveries count).

**Figure 2** below shows the spread of essential deliveries from each local delivery hub. Due to the ongoing impact of COVID we are continuing to support essential deliveries across West Midlands.

**Figure 2. - Essential Deliveries by Hub**



Whilst this has been a challenging task where our staff have been meeting the most vulnerable members of the community in difficult circumstances it has also been very rewarding. We have received lots of positive feedback from staff, representative bodies, partners and the community and are currently developing a staff volunteer scheme to create opportunities to maintain this positive activity.

### **Face Mask Fitting**

WMFS have a good understanding and reputation in respect of face mask fitting due to existing skills and training. Consequently, a request to assist NHS dental staff across the West Midlands was received. To support this request volunteers undertook a one-day NHS refresher training course to become competent NHS face fit testers. This team have now completed 27 face fit testing sessions across 6 dental practices. The demand for this support is forecasted to grow and extend beyond the WMFS boundary, so to manage the ongoing impact WMFS are now working collaboratively with neighboring FRSs.



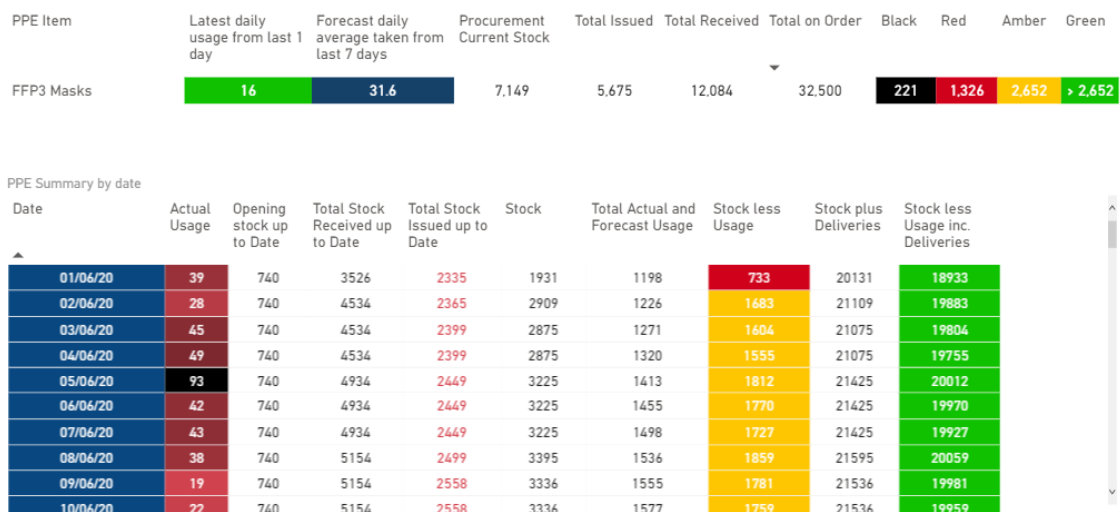
## 4.5 Supply Chains and PPE

The provision of critical PPE, particularly respiratory PPE, was a challenge for the Service, as it was for all organisations, particularly during the early stages of the pandemic. As a result, the supply chain was recording a red status as part of the Services BRAG Risk Rating until the end of May 2020.

In early April, orders for a range of PPE items were placed with Kent FRS, which was acting as a co-ordination point for national procurement arrangements on behalf of the NFCC. However, these arrangements also suffered delays in delivery as part of the difficulties being experienced by suppliers in securing PPE items.

As a consequence, the WMFS Corporate Procurement Section continued to seek supplies from alternative companies identified from existing and new contacts. It was predominantly through these efforts that PPE levels improved, resulting in the BRAG rating moving to Amber by the end of May and to Green at the end of June. The BRAG rating remains at green meaning that it is estimated there is circa 6 months' supply of critical PPE for the Service. The management of this critical resource was also supported by our approach to collecting live data (usage and stock levels) and monitoring through our COVID-19 Data Dashboard as shown below in **Figure 3**.

**Fig. 3 – Supply Chain Dashboard Screenshot**



## **5. DELIVERABLES**

The Brigade Managers are accountable to the Chief Fire Officer (CFO), through the programme aims 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 the Integrated Risk Management Programme (IRMP).

The CFO is ultimately accountable for the Programmes and will challenge the delivery and value release to ensure the aims and objectives are being achieved. The Programmes are accountable for Projects.

The deliverables (aims and objectives) of the three Programmes are shown below, supported by the Programme achievements, constraints, active risks and issues.

## **6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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.

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

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

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.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 The Authority received approximately £2.8m Government funding to support COVID related expenditure. Monthly updates have been provided to Members via Members Briefings and Policy Planning meetings showing actual and forecast expenditure against this amount.

8.2 The response to the COVID situation and pause in 'normal' projects (3PT) has caused a delay in expenditure in some areas of the current year's revenue and capital budgets, which is reflected in the 'Monitoring of Finances' report later, on the same agenda.

## **9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Authority Report 30 September 2019

Authority Report 18 November 2019

Authority Report 17 February 2020

Authority Report 6 April 2020

The contact name for this report is Karen Gowreesunker, telephone number 0121 380 6678 or 07973 810338

PHIL LOACH  
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER