

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE

Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier

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@WestMidsFire

Fire Service Headquarters,
99 Vauxhall Road, Birmingham B7 4HW

**Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
November 2022**

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

'Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier'

Report by Cllr Peter Hogarth

Membership of the Authority

The Member of the Authority for 2022-23 is as follows:

Local Authority	Councillor(s)
Birmingham	Councillor Zafar Iqbal* (Labour) <i>Vice-Chair</i> Councillor Gurdial Singh Atwal (Labour) Councillor Sybil Spence (Labour) Councillor David Barrie (Conservative)
Coventry	Councillor Catherine Miks* (Labour) Councillor Gavin Lloyd# (Labour)
Dudley	Councillor Peter Miller* (Conservative) Councillor Ian Kettle (Conservative)
Sandwell	Councillor Rizwan Jalil* (Labour) Councillor Zahir Hussain (Labour)
Solihull	Councillor Peter Hogarth MBE* (Conservative)
Walsall	Councillor Vera Waters* (Conservative) Councillor Ann Young (Labour)
Wolverhampton	Councillor Greg Brackenridge* (Labour) <i>Chair</i> Councillor Jas Dehar (labour)
Additional Member(s)	
Independent Member of the Audit and Risk Committee	Mr Mike Ager
Independent Member of Appointments, Standards and Appeals	Mr R Tomkinson (Standards Committee only)
Co-opted Members of the Authority	Professor Simon Brake Sarah Middleton
Police and Crime Commissioner: Represented by (if applicable):	Simon Foster Assistant PCC Wasim Ali Richard Castello – Head of Communications

*Section 41 member

Replaced Cllr Seamus Walsh as of 10 October 2022

Service Performance against Strategic Plan 2021/22

WMFS set a range of targets for operational and other performance indicators, which enable the Service to define the improvements which contribute to making the West Midlands safer, stronger and healthier, and to manage the resources allocated to this work. The latest reported figures for the service as a whole are reported below. It should be noted that these figures cover a period impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw an overall reduction in incident numbers as well as face-to-face prevention and protection activity.

Indicator	Target	Performance
Risk Based Attendance Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Category 1 (high risk) – 5 minutes Category 2 – 7 minutes Category 3 – 10 minutes Category 4 – 20 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Category 1 - 4 minutes 43 seconds Category 2 – 5 minutes 26 seconds Category 3 – 4 minutes 59 seconds Category 4 – 7 minutes 8 seconds
Accidental dwelling fires	1623 (tolerance 1543-1655)	1506 – overperformance
Injuries from accidental fires in dwellings (requiring hospital treatment)	52 (41-57)	43 – performance on track
Safe & Well points achieved by the Brigade (visits to higher risk people bring a bigger point score)	259,680 (259,680 – 272,664)	252,269 – underperformance
Deliberate fires in dwellings	202 (180-212)	193 – performance on track
Deliberate rubbish fires	1448 (1375-1476)	1356 – overperformance
Deliberate fires in derelict buildings	108 (98-113)	121 – underperformance
Accidental fires in non-domestic premises	406 (366-426)	390 – performance on track
False alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment problems	5797 (5508 – 5912)	5930 – underperformance

Local Authority performance and key statistics

In addition to the service level performance indicators above, specific statistics are available for the Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council area for Q1 and Q2 2022-23 (April-September 2022). As these are the latest figures, they are subject to change as data is further interrogated.

Indicator	Performance	Notes
Accidental Dwelling Fires	37	Overperforming target for the year
Deliberate Rubbish Fires	21	Overperforming target for the year
False Alarms (Equipment)	174	On target for the year
Safe and Wells completed	1,441 (47.5% from partner referrals)	Above 45% target for partner referrals
Average Assessment Points*	6.86	In line with the service average

* Assessment points measure the vulnerability of the individual or family we undertake a SAW with – the more vulnerable someone is, the more points that visit will garner. WMFS is committed to targeting our interventions at the most vulnerable in our communities.

WMFS activities during the last six months

1. HMICFRS Inspection Update

The latest round of the inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services began in January 2022 and concluded on 21 May 2022. The second round continued to assess performance within the three main themes of Effectiveness, Efficiency and People. This was followed with a debrief with the Chair of the Authority and Chief Fire Officer. The final inspection report is due to be published in early 2023.

[Read WMFS's 2019 HMICFRS report here.](#)

2. Hot Weather response

There were two significant periods of hot weather over July and August, with the two days in July (18th & 19th) seeing the UK hit over 40°C which is a new record. Over the two days in July Staffordshire & West Midlands Fire Control (SWMFC) received around 1000 calls and attended just over 300 incidents. This represented a significant increase in calls and incidents compared to business as usual (Where normally we would only receive up to 300 calls).

The service managed our response within are normal business as usual arrangements and were able to support National Resilience arrangements by sending two PRLs to Norfolk for 12 hours following a request from the Service. In addition to this, WMFS also supported neighbouring Services which included a significant incident on top of the Lickey Hills (Hereford & Worcester FRS). In all cases where WMFS sent resources over the border, this was done following a risk assessment to ensure that we were able to meet the increased demands on the Service from the communities of the West Midlands.

The heatwave in August (11th to 14th) extended over the course of the weekend and whilst not hitting temperatures as high as those seen in July, nevertheless saw a significant increase in calls received and incidents attended. Due to the prolonged period, spate conditions were declared within WMFS which allowed the service to activate plans to ensure that Fire Control was not overwhelmed with calls. This 'buddying' arrangement would see overflow calls being picked up by other control rooms across the country if required, in this instance LFB (SWMFC

also has buddy arrangements with North West Fire Control). However, this is not the same as Ops Welbeck which is a national procedure for distributing calls in the event of Fire Control rooms being overwhelmed. In total between 11th August to 14th August Staffordshire & West Midlands Fire Control received 2909 calls and mobilised resources to 954 incidents (704 West Midlands and 232 Staffordshire FRS).

3. Tech upgrade benefits West Midlands 999 fire callers

A major tech upgrade in [Staffordshire and West Midlands Fire Control](#) (SWMFC) is benefiting 999 callers. The 'Vision 4' system enables control room staff to pinpoint the locations of emergencies even more accurately and quickly, and to mobilise fire engines and other resources more rapidly.

It will be used to handle approximately 70,000 calls taken by the control room each year, and to manage resources at 38,00 incidents attended by firefighters across the West Midlands and Staffordshire. Since its 'go live' on 7 June, the system has been used to manage more than 2,000 999 calls across the two fire and rescue services' areas.

Just two days after its launch, the system was used by SWMFC to manage a significant fire at a paper processing and recycling plant in Birmingham to which 20 fire engines were initially mobilised. [The full article can be accessed here.](#)

4. West Midlands Fire Service host UKRO festival

From September 29th – October 1st 2022, West Midlands Fire Service was proud to host the prestigious UKRO Festival of Rescue 2022. Communities from across the region were invited to come and see the show, and thousands attended to see more than 400 expert fire crews from across the UK test their skills across a variety of challenging scenarios (despite very poor weather on the Friday!)

Teams competed to be the best at vehicle extrication, rope rescue from height, water rescue, trauma care and urban search and rescue from collapsed structures. We also introduced a new "Firefighter fitness challenge" for the first time and welcomed national fire cadets to compete in their own Trauma challenge.

We're delighted that the West Midlands Cadets took first place in the Cadet Trauma Challenge, and West Midlands placed third in the USAR, Rope Rescue and Trauma.

[Read more about the event here.](#)

[Find out each of the award winners here.](#)

5. Immediate Detriment – Firefighters Pension Scheme

In 2015 most public service pension schemes, including the Firefighters' Pension Scheme, were reformed. These reforms included 'transitional protection' for people closest to retirement. In 2018, the Court of Appeal ruled that the transitional protection element of the 2015 public service pension reforms constituted unlawful age discrimination in the Firefighters' Pension Schemes.

On 7 December 2020, the Audit and Risk Committee, in its role as Scheme Manager for the Firefighters' Pension Schemes, took the decision to instruct the scheme administrator to act upon guidance issued by the Home Office in August 2020 to make payment to "Immediate Detriment" cases – where pension scheme members had been financially impacted by the unlawful pension reforms. The Government confirmed that it will remove the difference in treatment across all main public service pension schemes.

On 29 November 2021, the Home Office withdrew their guidance. The key reason for withdrawal of the guidance was uncertainty on the power of Section 61 of the Equalities Act 2010 to support correction of Immediate Detriment cases before new legislation was in place, with specific reference to tax relief on the contributions that a member would need to make to reinstate their membership of the 1992 Pension scheme.

On 6th June 2022 the Audit and Risk Committee, in its role as Scheme Manager for the Firefighters' Pension Scheme, approved to lift the pause in processing of Immediate Detriment cases. To ensure that payments can be processed efficiently, and normal activity can continue with limited impact, a staged approach to implementing the decision is proposed.

Members who are currently active and who have membership within the legacy period, (1st April 2015 to 31st March 2022), known as Category 1 members, will be offered a choice of benefits aligned to the arrangements set out in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) agreed between the LGA and the FBU on 8th October 2021.

Members known as Category 2 members, who left the scheme after 1st April 2015 and before 30th June 2022, with service during the legacy period and who have already submitted a claim for remedy under the terms of the MoU, need to be processed. The aim is to process all of these cases by 28th February 2023, if not before, prioritised based on the date a claim was made, dealing with the earliest claim first and working through all subsequent claims.

6. Inclusion in the Fire and Rescue Service – Uniform and Equipment

West Midlands Fire Service remains committed to being a diverse and inclusive service, which reflects the population and communities it represents. However, it is recognised that some important operational policies, in place to protect the health and safety of staff, may make it difficult for people with certain beliefs to pursue a career in the Fire and Rescue Service.

Current Fire Service policy and national Health and Safety Legislation mean that operational firefighters that have to wear breathing apparatus (BA) must be clean-shaven. This ensures an appropriate seal is maintained to prevent dangerous gases or particulates from entering the face mask. This requirement is reflected in both current health and safety legislation, and the guidance issued by BA manufacturers. There are currently no BA sets that meet UK standards that allow for facial hair. This may prove a barrier for Muslims, Sikhs or Orthodox Jews, as well as individuals with medical conditions that may make shaving difficult.

At the end of 2021 work was commissioned to review the Service's uniform policy, specifically around facial hair with a view to enabling uniformed personnel who are not likely to be required to wear BA to wear facial hair. The benefits of providing greater flexibility for members of staff to have facial hair. This policy is progressing towards consultation.

The review of our uniform policy also extends to what our people choose to wear. We understand that members of staff, including operational employees, may consider the wearing

religious or cultural dress and symbols an important expression of an individual's religion, belief, or identity and WMFS will, wherever reasonable, support these wishes. Some individuals may also wish to avoid certain materials in their clothing/dress due to a belief or lifestyle choice. Each circumstance will be judged on its own merit and consider an appropriate risk assessment.

There is also currently national work underway to determine the currency of current guidance and HSE regulations around facial hair and the wearing of BA. The Service is engaged directly with this work, led by the NFCC, to explore the opportunities which may exist around research and development of a solution to existing health and safety barriers to allowing facial hair in operational roles.

National Fire and Rescue Service developments

1. Fire Reform White Paper

The Government first announced its intention to publish a White Paper on Fire Reform in Spring of 2021, although various other priorities delayed its publication until May 2022. The paper, entitled [Reforming our Fire and Rescue Services](#) kicked off a period of consultation that closed in July 2022.

The reform agenda covers three broad areas – People, Professionalism and Governance – and includes proposals such as;

- Increased flexibility about the way fire service resource are used and can be adapted to new ways of working.
- A review into fire service pay negotiation mechanisms
- Introduction of new senior leadership training and talent management pathways.
- Placing the LGA and NFCC Code of Ethics on a statutory footing.
- Introduction of a new College of Fire (mirroring the current College of Policing).
- A move to a single accountable political leader for services (PCC, Mayor or Executive Cabinet Member)
- Statutory Operational Independence for Chief Fire Officers.

Both the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority and the Senior Officer team provided responses to the consultation.

2. Grenfell Tower Inquiry – Recommendations and Actions

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry was formed in August 2017 to investigate the circumstances surrounding the tragic fire that occurred on 14 June 2017 and which claimed the lives of 71 people. It produced its first set of recommendations in a four-part report published in October 2019.

These recommendations applied to local authorities, government, industry, and fire services (in particular London Fire Brigade) and included a wide range of suggested improvements and changes relating to building design and construction, communications, command and control, training and other matters.

West Midlands Fire Service have worked hard since then to implement the relevant recommendations, including:

- Auditing and collecting more information on all residential tall buildings over 18m in the West Midlands area
- Updating training and procedures regarding the provision of Fire Survival Guidance to people trapped by fire, including implementing new digital tools
- Updated evacuation policies including relevant training
- Introducing new training for all staff on fires in tall buildings as part of fully refreshed policy and procedures.
- New training exercises implemented for fires in tall buildings
- Collaborated with social and private housing providers to ensure that Building Information Plates (BIPs) are fitted to all residential tall buildings.
- Working with local authorities and housing providers to increase the use of sprinklers in higher risk (including tall) residential buildings.

The second phase of the inquiry began shortly after, and has recently completed its public phase. The report and recommendations are expected in the near future and WMFS will again take steps to implement relevant recommendations as a matter of priority.

3. National Pay Negotiation

Employees of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority are either employed on “Grey Book” employees if they are operational firefighters or fire control staff, or on “Green Book” conditions as local government employees.

In July 2022, Grey Book employees were offered a 2% pay increase for 2022/23 by Local Government Employers through the National Joint Council. This was rejected by Representative Bodies in August 2022, and steps taken to ballot for industrial action. National Employers have subsequently offered a 5% pay increase, funded from service budgets (as no further funding has been made available by the Home Office). The FBU are balloting members on the pay offer and are recommending rejection. The ballot will likely go ahead throughout November.

As with all other local government employees, Green Book employees have been offered a fixed sum increase by National Employers of £1,950, plus other benefits. Representative bodies have balloted members on the offer, which was accepted on 1 November.