

Statement of Assurance – 2019/20

Middle Introduction

Fire and Rescue authorities must provide annual assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show how they have had due regard to the expectations set out in their Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and the requirements included in the [Framework](#).

The West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA) is required to publish an annual Statement of Assurance as part of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

The Statement of Assurance for West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service is published annually, to provide an easy and accessible way for communities, government, local authorities, and partners to assess the Authority's performance and governance arrangements.

National guidance on the content of Statements of Assurance published in May 2013 suggests that where authorities have already set out relevant information that is clear, accessible and user friendly within existing documents, they may wish to include extracts or links to these documents within their Statement of Assurance. This Statement includes extracts or links to key documents where relevant. This document sets out the approach taken to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place in terms of governance and operational delivery. It is intended to provide transparent information about its financial, governance and operational affairs.

Foreword – Chair and CFO

Welcome to the annual Statement of Assurance from Councillor Greg Brackenridge, Chair of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA), (The Authority) and Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS). This Statement of Assurance provides the reassurance that in 2019/20 your Fire and Rescue Service contributed to 'Making the West Midlands, Safer, Stronger and Healthier'.

2019/20 was the last year of the Government's four-year settlement and core funding received by WMFS reduced by £0.982m. This has resulted in overall Government core funding being reduced by £38m between 2010/11 and 2019/20. Plans have been in place to manage this reduction and to minimise any potential impact on our community. This has continued to be a significant challenge for WMFS, but one that has been embraced through effective risk management and a commitment to continuously improving the way in which we deliver services to our communities, within a balanced budget.

During 2019/20 WMFS in response to the pandemic Covid-19, the West Midlands declared a major incident. This led to the adoption of its business continuity arrangements to be able to continue to provide services to the communities of the West Midlands, whilst keeping its employees safe.

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a nationwide lockdown which has had an impact on the Authority's "business as usual". The Authority operated within the provisions of the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020, to ensure continuity of governance and scrutiny of the Service and engagement with regional partners. This was managed through weekly briefing by video conferencing and the application of 'matters of urgency' enabled from the Authority Constitution.

The professionalism and dedication of the firefighters of WMFS to respond assertively, effectively, and safely – combined with the high risk-based, five-minute attendance standard – remains at the heart of its Service Delivery Model. WMFS has worked with academics and medical experts on research that shows the time it takes to get to an incident is critical to someone surviving a fire or a road traffic collision.

Our commitment to delivering excellent services to our communities was recognised by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) during 2019. WMFS are the only one of the 45 Fire and Rescue Services to achieve an 'outstanding' rating for its response to fires and other emergencies. This level of recognition for its response services was received in the first year of this new inspection process.

As Chair of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority and Chief Fire Officer of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service, we are satisfied that during 2019/20 the business of the service has been conducted in accordance with good standards and that public money has been accurately accounted for.

Finance

The WMFRA places significant importance in ensuring that its financial management arrangements are in line with the expectations of a public body. As a public service the Authority are responsible for ensuring that public money is properly accounted for and spent in a way that provides value for money.

Statement of Accounts

The 2019/20 (unaudited) [Statement of Accounts](#) were approved by the Fire Authority's Audit and Risk Committee on the 27 July 2020. The audited Statement of Accounts were then presented for approval by Members at the Fire Authority meeting held on 5 October 2020.

The Authority's accounts for the financial year 2019/20 consist of the following:-

- The Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, the Authority's main revenue account, covering income and expenditure on all services.
- The Movement in Reserves Statement, which shows the movement in the year on the different reserves held by the Authority.
- The Balance Sheet, which sets out the financial position of the Authority at the 31 March 2020.
- The Cash Flow Statement, showing movements in cash and cash equivalents during the year and the cash position at the year end.
- The Pension Fund Account, which summaries the movements relating to the firefighters' pension schemes.

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted at the very end of the 2019/20 financial year and therefore the full impact of this is not reflected in the Statement of Accounts. However, the Authority are expecting significant challenges in the year ahead as it deals with the on-going crisis.

To help WMFS to respond to the pressures of Covid-19, the Authority received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on the 27 March 2020, a cash advance to assist with cash flow of £2.3m. This payment relates to the section 31 business rates relief grant for 2020/21. To support Covid-19 funding, two separate allocations amounting to £2.8m have been made by the MHCLG to the Authority. The first issued on 20 March 2020 for £0.6m and the second, issued on 28 April 2020 for £2.2m. The utilisation and impact of these grants will be reported in the Statement of Assurance for 2020/21.

Governance

The Authority is required to produce an "[Annual Governance Statement](#)" which is published in July each year at the same time as the "Annual Statement of Accounts". The Governance Statement 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 and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

It explains how our service manages its governance and internal control arrangements and measures the effectiveness of those arrangements.

Governance Assurance

WMFRA is a Joint Authority established under the Local Government Act 1985, amended "The Fire and Rescue Authority (Membership) Order 2017".

It is a supervisory body that ensure that WMFS perform efficiently and in the best interests of the public and the community it serves. It means that the Service is answerable for its actions and performance to the public.

WMFRA have statutory responsibilities laid down in legislation including the:-

- Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
- Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007
- Localism Act 2011
- Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018
- The Policing and Crime Act 2017
- The Health and Safety Work Act 1974

WMFRA is led by its Chair, Councillor Greg Brackenridge and it comprises of 15 elected Members who represent the 7 local authorities that make up the West Midlands, the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner and two co-opted Members (one representing health and one representing business). The 7 local authorities are:- Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall, and Wolverhampton councils.

WMFRA have a [Constitution](#) that outlines how it carries out its affairs. It explains how decisions are made and brings together in one document the detailed rules and procedures that govern the behaviour of those who work for or represent the Authority.

The Authority Members have developed and adopted a local [Code of Corporate Governance](#) document which incorporates how the Authority meets the seven principles of good governance. The Fire Authority ensures that its governance structures comply with the seven core principles and sub-principles of the [CIPFA/SOLACE](#) – 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016'.

These principles are adhered to via the processes outlined in the Constitution.

To enable the authority to carry out its duties effectively, in addition to the Fire Authority meetings there are several committees and regular forums that include:-

- Appointments, Standards and Appeals Committee
- Audit and Risk Committee
- Collaboration and Transformation Committee
- Joint Consultative Panel
- Pensions Board
- Policy Planning Forum
- Scrutiny Committee

You can find out more about the Fire Authority and its Members on the website, www.wmfs.net. In addition, there is a Committee Management Information System ([CMIS](#)) which provides details of all Authority and Committee meetings, reports, minutes, and records of decisions.

External Audit

The accounts are audited by independent external auditors (Grant Thornton UK LLP) who in addition to auditing the accounts, also provide assurance that the Authority has the correct arrangements in place for securing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in its use of resources. The full external audit work programme and the risk-based approach are explained in Grant Thornton's [Audit Plan](#). Their findings and their opinion on the Authority's accounts and the value for money is included within the [Audit Findings Report](#). As a result of the external audit work in 2019/20, there were no significant matters arising that required the Authority to implement an action for improvement. The [Annual Audit Letter](#) summarises the key findings for the 2019/20 year.

Internal Audit

Internal Audit is carried out by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.

The purpose of internal audit is to provide the Authority with an independent and objective opinion to risk management, control and governance and their effectiveness in achieving the Authority's agreed objectives. To enable Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council to provide this opinion, they are required to review annually the risk management and governance processes within the Authority. In addition, they need to review on a cyclical basis, the operation of internal control systems within the Authority. Internal audit is not a substitute for effective internal control. The role of internal audit is to contribute to internal control by examining, evaluating, and reporting to management on its adequacy and effectiveness.

The **Annual Audit Plan** is agreed by the Audit and Risk Committee and progress reported on a quarterly basis. The annual plan of Internal Audit includes the following:

- The areas subject to review (Auditable Area).
- The level of risk to the Authority assigned to each auditable area (high, medium, or low).
- The number and type of recommendations accepted by management.
- The level of assurance given to each system under review.
- Details of any key issues arising from the above.

Other sources of assurance on which the Authority may rely include:-

- The work of the External Auditors (currently Grant Thornton)
- The result of any quality accreditation
- The outcome of visits by HM Revenue & Customs
- Other pieces of consultancy or third-party work designed to alert the Authority to areas of improvement
- Other external review agencies

Financial

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require that the accounts be submitted to Members for approval by the end of July. However, for 2019/20 only the Regulations have been amended by the Accounts & Audit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020. The amendments to the Regulations were made in response to the unprecedented situation across the UK relating to COVID-19 and the need to reduce the pressure on all Authorities to comply with legal deadlines. As such, these Regulations provide the Authority with additional time to complete the 2019/20 audit, given the likely impact of the COVID-19 virus on the availability of staff and auditors to complete the audit process within current deadlines due to sickness or redeployment.

The deadline to publish the Authority's unaudited 2019/20 Statement of Accounts have been changed from 31 May 2020 to 31 August 2020 with the deadline to publish the audited accounts being pushed back from 31 July 2020 to 30 November 2020, these were published on the 8 March 2021.

Data Transparency and Accountability

In preparing this Statement of Assurance, the Authority has considered the principles of transparency, promoting openness and accountability through reporting on local decision making, public spending and democratic processes. All relevant information is published on the West Midlands Fire Service website in line

with the [Local Government Transparency Code 2015](#), including information on how the Authority has spent its public money, demonstrating the Authority's commitment to transparency and accountability.

OPERATIONAL

Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)

The IRMP provides an assessment and analysis of fire and rescue related risks within the West Midlands. It shows how WMFS will target its resources so that the Service can prevent incidents from happening, while also making sure resources are located in the best position to protect the community, enabling the Service to continue to provide the highest standards of service in the areas of Prevention, Protection and Emergency Response through the Service Delivery Model. The IRMP co-exists alongside the medium-term financial plan and 'Our Plan' which together comprise our three-year rolling strategy.

Public Consultation

In line with the National Fire and Rescue Framework, we have committed to consult on the IRMP every three years, or where there is a material change to this risk assessment. WMFRA are committed to enabling the wider community to understand the strength in the risk-based approach to the delivery of services across the West Midlands and to understand the public's expectation of their Fire Service.

Since the last consultation that took place during 2016/17 there have been several national and local reports and inspections that have been undertaken:

- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) independent assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of all fire and rescue services.
- State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2019; and
- The NFCC, National Employers (England) and LGA 'Fit for the Future' report 2020.

These are likely to change the way Fire and Rescue Services operate and deliver services to communities in the future. The service continues to monitor and act upon the outcomes of the Hackett and Kerslake reviews published in 2018.

The IRMP as an assessment of fire related risk across the West Midlands was scheduled to be consulted upon in late 2019 to support the determination of the Authority's strategic priorities 2020-21. However, the consultation process was paused as a direct result of the announcement of the General Election in December 2019.

The consultation was rescheduled for early in 2020 but was once again was delayed, this time due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The consultation is planned to take place late in 2020 and the results of the consultation will be shared in the Statement of Assurance, 2020/21.

The IRMP consultation will support a review of the Authority's three-year rolling Strategy and annual priorities for February 2021, enabling the revision of the Strategy for 2021-24.

Mutual Aid Arrangements

WMFRA has mutual assistance arrangements in place with all the Fire and Rescue Services that surround the West Midlands – Hereford and Worcester, Shropshire, Staffordshire, and Warwickshire. Arrangements are in place to support the neighbouring Fire Services in the event of a large-scale incident or where the resources of our neighbouring Fire Services were greatly reduced.

The Authority is a partner in the West Midlands Conurbation Local Resilience Forum (LRF), the statutory multi-agency partnership set up to ensure the local authorities, emergency services and environment agency in partnership with other services including utility companies fulfil their duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The forum enables the planning to be in place in preparation for localised incidents and disastrous emergencies which may impact on the communities within the West Midlands.

The Police and Crime Act 2017 placed a duty on Fire, Police and Ambulance services to collaborate to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of emergency services. WMFS will continue to work with partners to find better ways of working together to ensure we keep the communities of the West Midlands safer, stronger, and healthier. The service recognises that better joint working can deliver savings for taxpayers and improve services to the community. WMFS work with partners to optimise multi-agency response and resilience through enhanced working relationships, in line with the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP).

In support of National Resilience and enabled through Central Government funding, the service has enhanced its capability to respond to major emergencies such as terrorist attacks, industrial and domestic accidents, and natural disasters. WMFS are also a partner in the Multi-Agency Specialist Assessment Team (MASAT) which

provides an initial assessment of potential Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear or Explosive (CBRNE) incidents.

The Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) and International Search and Rescue (ISAR) teams are on call 24/7 providing the ability to rapidly respond to incidents locally, nationally, and internationally, assisting and undertaking search and rescue operations.

Health, safety, and wellbeing

The Service has a primary responsibility for risk management and is committed to complying with its duties under the Health and Safety Work Act 1974 and associated legislation for health, safety, and wellbeing, to enable this.

In line with delivering a “safer, stronger and healthier West Midlands”, it is important to maintain focus on ensuring that the service continues to develop a positive approach to employee health, safety and wellbeing and to protect others from harm from its activities. To this end, the aim is for an assertive, effective, and safe approach when responding to emergencies.

The Authority and Service are committed to working with all its employees and partners (internal and external) to achieve high standards of, and continuous improvements in, health and safety, which protects employees and others we work with and affect.

This commitment has been recognised by the HMICFRS who stated, “*West Midlands Fire Service has robust health and safety arrangements in place, including a governance process for strategic oversight and management of all health and safety issues.*”

External Operational Assurance

In July 2017, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) extended its remit to include inspections of England’s Fire and Rescue Services. HMICFRS assess and report on the efficiency, effectiveness, and people of the 45 fire and rescue services in England.

Inspections focus on the service provided to the public. They assess how well Fire and Rescue Services prevent, protect against, and respond to fires and other emergencies and how well they look after the people who work for the service.

Fire and Rescue Services are given graded judgements as outcomes of each inspection. These are:-

- Outstanding

- Good
- Requires improvement, and
- Inadequate

HMICFRS judged that West Midlands Fire service is:-

- 'Good' at effectively keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks.
- 'Good' at efficiently keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks and
- 'Good' at looking after its people.

Within the 'effectiveness' element, the Service was rated as 'outstanding' for its response to fires and other emergencies. The Service is the only one from 44 other Fire and Rescue Services to achieve this level of recognition for its response services in this first year of inspection.

Within the 'people' element there were two 'requires improvement' aligned to promoting values and culture and developing leadership and capability.

These areas for improvement were subsequently included for consideration by an 'Independent Cultural Review' conducted by an external service following the aversion of a Trade Dispute.

The purpose of this review was:-

- To undertake an independent root and branch review of the service including the Fire Authority, the Service, personnel and Trade Unions to assess the culture and relationships and the impact they have on the successful operation of the Service, along with the health and wellbeing of employees within the existing culture.
- To identify areas of good practice and further considerations that can be made to support effective and functional relations between all parties in the future.
- To identify future cultural challenges within WMFS to ensure the best possible position to deliver for the communities of the West Midlands.

The cultural review report stated the following:-

*'As an service, it therefore appears not a question of **'what'** you have to do to address the concerns and dissatisfaction of the Service that have led up to the dispute but more a question of **'how'** you are going to do it. At the minute there are*

different views and opinions of how things should be led, managed and delivered and it is materialising as a perceived resistance to change.'

It concluded that:-

- **Vision:** is clear and the staff recognises and appears to subscribe to it.
- **Values:** the core values describe what everyone feels is important to them.
- **Employee Relations Framework:** emphasises joint working.
- **Constitution:** of the Fire Authority is clear about the role of members.
- **Governance:** The senior management team have described levels of responsibility and accountability.
- **Development:** Managers are provided with input through the managing and leading excellence programme.

Both the inspection and the cultural review report have been communicated to all staff. All stakeholders have been involved in addressing the matters identified in numerous workshops and meetings. Work continues but has been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Awards

WMFS is always delighted to receive external awards and two that were awarded during the year were: -

The Guardian announced WMFS as the winner of the Workplace Diversity category of their Public Serves Awards 2019. The Guardian had recognised the work that the Service had done to encourage more people from under-represented groups, including women and people from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME). This was a fantastic achievement towards our objective of being an employer that reflects the composition of the communities we serve.

Fire Magazine "Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards" recognised Coventry Fire Station and several of our partners pick up the Resilience and Learning from Major Incident's award for the fantastic multi agency work that has taken place at the simulation centre at Coventry University.

Internal Operational Assurance

The Chief Fire Officer, Phil Loach leads the Strategic Enabling Team (SET). This senior management team oversee the shape and direction of the service and that it is adhering to our legal responsibilities.

WMFS operates a three-year rolling strategy known as '**Our Plan**', this document sets out how the Service will fulfil its vision of "Making the West Midlands safer, stronger and healthier". The aim is to achieve this through its priorities and outcomes set by the people of the West Midlands through consultation and with their Fire Authority. In summary, these include:-

- The **response priorities** that focus on dealing excellently with emergency incidents
- The **prevention priorities** focus on making safer and healthier communities
- The **protection priorities** focus on protecting life and property to make businesses stronger and communities safer

WMFS delivers its priorities with effective delivery through collaboration outcomes, which are:-

- People – WMFS will create an inclusive workforce
- Digital transformation – WMFS will enhance and transform services to its communities, underpinning them with innovative and digital solutions
- Value for Money – Working closely with its partner services is key to delivering its services effectively and efficiently.

The performance of WMFS during 2019/20

The Service has an established online performance management dashboard system, supplemented by a quarterly reporting forum of senior officers and including the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee. The performance of the Service is reported and discussed at the Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis. thereby progress made against "Our Plan".

The setting of targets against operational and other performance indicators enables the Service to identify key areas for improvement which contribute to making the West Midlands safer, stronger, and healthier.

The five-minute attendance standard lies at the heart of its Service Delivery Model which shows how staff based mainly at fire stations deliver the three strategic objectives of response, prevention, and protection.

Response

WMFS know that its five-minute response is based on evidence and knowledge of risk and that it saves lives, homes, and businesses. As at the 2019/20 year-end, the overall median attendance time to Category 1 incidents was 281 seconds (4.41 minutes) which was one second quicker than the previous year.

Prevention

The prevention work focuses on reducing people's vulnerability to the type of emergencies to which the service responds. WMFS also have specialist prevention and partnership teams who support its firefighters in reducing anti-social behaviour, including arson, and improving road safety. As at the 2019/20 year-end the service attended 694 'Deliberate Vehicle Fires'. This was 13.9% below the forecasted target of 806. This kind of incident has continued to decline since 2014/15.

Protection

The protection work focuses on helping businesses to thrive, making the West Midlands stronger. WMFS advises companies how best to comply with fire safety legislation, to keep its staff and customers safe. As at 2019/20 year-end the service attended 435 'Accidental Fires in Non-Domestic Premises'. This was 1.1% above the forecasted target of 430, yet despite this 'Accidental Fires in Non-Domestic Premises' were at the second lowest level since 1998/99.

How do WMFS do it?

From finance through to its vehicles, technology and communications, the service works hard to ensure that its services are delivered in the most relevant, effective, and efficient ways. Everything that is done is achieved and risk in our communities is reduced by its cost-efficient, flexible, and agile workforce.

At a time of unprecedented change and financial challenges for the public sector, the staff of WMFS keep finding exciting and new ways to transform the services that are provided to achieve even more with less.

This has been made possible by the exceptional workforce, a blended fleet of vehicles, a new approach to communication and a commitment to the use of technology.

WMFS aspire to keep delivering services in the most relevant, efficient, and effective ways for its communities.

National Developments

Phase 1 Report of the Public Inquiry into the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017

The report was published on 30 October 2019. It contains several recommendations against which WMFS is considering and is acting and will consider its position and where appropriate, take action to ensure continuous improvement in enabling the delivery of our Vision of “Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier.”

In the immediate aftermath of the fire, WMFS co-ordinated the sector response on behalf of the National Fire Chief Council (NFCC). The service collated and identified ACM cladding on tall buildings across all Fire and Rescue Services. This approach enabled the establishment and maintenance of effective communications and information workflows between government departments, the NFCC and all Fire and Rescue Services. As a service it continues to work closely with the NFCC to develop its own understanding and influence the sector approach moving forward.

As part of this approach, Fire safety and station-based crews completed fire safety audits and site-specific risk information (SSRI) visits at the 551 residential tall buildings in the Service’s seven local authority areas. This has included updated information on ACM and other flammable material attached to building exteriors.

As a regulator, WMFS is one of the few FRS that has used its legislative powers to ensure that risk is reduced by ensuring that plans are in place to remove unsafe cladding and address compartmentation issues. This initial and growing demand on Fire Safety Officers has been proactively managed through the increase of the number of staff by 11 officers.

The continual review of initial action plans, hazards and firefighting/protection systems is key to our capturing and recording of relevant information. Preplanning through SSRI and visits under 7.2 (d) of the FRS Act 2004 enables for WMFS to record risks and safety critical information. The service has worked closely with partners to understand risk in high-rise residential and other tall buildings. Where appropriate WMFS have increased its level of response to ensure this risk is managed during the initial stages of any incident.

WMFS is committed to continuous improvement and excellence in all aspects of its work and continually reviews all policies, systems, and processes in response to service intelligence. The high-risk policies and procedures have been reviewed, evaluated, and developed with key input from across the service, including those external links into National Operational Guidance (NOG). There was a strategic focus for all operational personal to familiarise themselves with the revised High-Rise policy and associated learning.

Through its effective partner relationships and specific events designed to target local authorities and house providers it has been able to influence the retrofitting of sprinkler systems in several tall buildings across the West Midlands area. This is consistent with both the Authority's and the NFCC's position promoting sprinklers and will significantly reduce risk to residents and firefighters who respond to fires in these premises.

The HMICFRS Inspection report of the Service published in late 2019 specifically noted the response and progress to the Grenfell Tower incident. It acknowledged the items described previously, of which re-prioritisation of risk-based inspection, competence of Incident Command and focus upon training and assessment featured significantly.

WMFS is currently considering its position and potential actions to be taken to ensure that it complies with or can support others to be compliant against all 47 recommendations of the Phase 1 recommendations. WMFS is considering and acting upon the recommendations from the 2019 Hackitt Report "Building a Better Future". The actions and activities arising will feature in the Statement of Assurance of 2020/21.

High Rise Incident Assurance

The Service proactively reviews intelligence and its preparedness for incidents in high-rise and high-risk tall buildings which can present the most challenging environment for the community and firefighters. The approach taken in managing these properties and the risks they present was positively acknowledged in the recent HMICFRS report. Key areas of activity are: -

- **Policy Revisions** – the High-Rise Policy has been constantly reviewed as intelligence has emerged both nationally and locally. The policy is aligned to National Operational Guidance where appropriate and enhanced to provide additional support locally. The revised policy has followed the recognised consultation process through the Employee Relations Framework and is supported by a robust training and communication plan. Whilst operational in its nature, key policy matters include:-
 - The Regulatory Reform Order considerations
 - Building Construction
 - Different types of High-Rise/Tall buildings
 - Dry/Wet Risers
 - Evacuation
 - Fire Control
- **Site Specific Risk Information (SSRI) System** – the Fire Authority has a responsibility under the Health & Safety at Work Act to provide information as necessary and reasonable practice for its employees.

One of the ways that this is undertaken is through the SSRI system. This provides a record of all high-rise buildings and any pertinent information that Incident Commanders would need to effectively manage an emergency incident.

The system is also designed to provide supporting operational plans to help manage an incident e.g. Initial Operational Plan, Water Plan, or Environmental Plan.

Whilst the service policy sets out initial actions, quality assurance, review schedules (based on risk) and training expectations, the high-rise assurance plan has highlighted areas that require additional focus and rigor alongside enhancements in digital support. There is also a growing number of new builds across the West Midlands area which fall into this high-risk category of building that are now being included within the SSRI system in a timely manner.

- **Incident Commander Competence** – This is a critical area where the service has responsibility to both the community and its staff. A significant investment is made into systems to provide acquisition, ongoing maintenance, and assurance of incident command competence. To provide the higher levels of health and safety compliance we have introduced ‘Standardised Assessments’ to ensure all of the core competencies required of a firefighter/officer are consistently assessed and recorded.
- However, in supporting the Health & Safety Framework, the service undertakes an annual Competency Risk Assessment which reviews the frequency of existing operational activities and any new activities being considered. To provide enhanced assurance around high-rise incidents, the service sets an expectation that every officer would complete a standardised incident command assessment specifically based on a high-rise fire. Additional investment has been made to create capacity to accommodate increased demand for these assessments. There is also a similar requirement to assess the competency of flexi-duty officers using a standardised assessment process.
- **Training Materials and Support** – to support the revised policy and staff achieve excellence, there have been enhancements to training and support materials. This includes new training packages and XVR incident command simulations undertaken both at the Command Development Centre and remotely where the simulations are taken to stations using a mobile platform. This is further supported by the high-rise training facility at Oldbury Fire Station.

- **Research and Development** – To support ongoing improvement to the capability and approach to dealing with fires in high-rise buildings, there are multiple new pieces of equipment being considered for inclusion on its frontline appliances. Items being considered are:-
 - Cleveland Coil Hose – an alternative way to use firefighting hose.
 - Smoke curtains and smoke hoods to support evacuation.
 - Electric PPV to support firefighting operations, e.g. failure of West Risers.

Tall Buildings

The Tall Building Action Plan satisfies all the recommendations from the Grenfell Phase One report and the assurance is provided to the Home Office via the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and reflected in the services Corporate Risk Register. WMFS is developing a revised Tall Buildings Policy in liaison with the NFCC and influencing the national approach through engagement with the National Operational Guidance Programme.

Staffing

Staffing is managed and evaluated within the 'People' Programme as part of the 'Workforce Planning Project'. Overall, the staffing arrangements and model continue to work effectively and efficiently in the delivery of the Service Delivery Model. The staffing arrangements are based on reduced establishment levels supplemented with the use of Voluntary Additional Shifts (VAS).

The project places attention to the 'ridership factor'; this accounts for the number of days people are unavailable for operational duties outside of allocated annual leave and includes absence related to sickness and restricted duties. Awareness of the ridership factor contributes to the understanding of fleet availability and consequently a measure of the effectiveness of our Service Delivery Model.

Property Asset Plan Project

The new Coventry Fire Station became operational in the summer of 2019. It has comprehensive new technology including a new turn out system where the appliance and incident type that is being mobilised is communicated via speakers through the turn out system. The training facility at Coventry is the next phase for development during 2020/21.

Fire Control Vision Project

Fire Control are using technology on a day-to-day basis including the increased use of 999Eye which enables Fire Control operators to see the incident through the camera on the caller's mobile phone and mobilise the right resources to the incident. The use of the Dynamic Cover Tool enables Fire Control to position the fleet and crews where risk is highest enabling the service to achieve its attendance standards and save life.

Brigade Response Vehicles and Brigade Support Vehicles

The Service operates a blended fleet of vehicles. The management of Unwanted Fire Signals from Automatic Fire Alarms is provided via Brigade Response Vehicles and Brigade Support Vehicles and has seen a reduction in the number of calls received. The performance indicator is 200 calls below target compared to nearly 400 over target for the same period in 2018/19. This is due to the work of Operational Crews, Business Support Officers and Fire Safety Officers giving advice and working with businesses to reduce the impact of calls on the Service Delivery Model.

The flexible staffing arrangements implemented due to the financial constraints are having an impact on value released by the Business Support Officers. This is due to the Officers being used to staff appliances during their shifts, reducing the Protection activities. The risk is being analysed and data is being reviewed to manage the issues highlighted.

Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP)

In 2011 the government set up the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme to look at options to replace Airwave. There has been a series of issues and delays where it is now anticipated that it will be delivered in December 2022.

WMFS continues to contribute to this programme through a dedicated project which also links to Staffordshire FRS due to the Shared Fire Control.

Distributed Training Model

The distributed training model continues to make use of local assets and resources and provides opportunities for West Midlands Fire Service firefighters to undertake training at locations throughout the service area. This localised approach supports the ethos of personal accountability in relation to workforce competence and operational excellence in the delivery of effective, safe, and assertive firefighting.

As crews undertake most of their training whilst remaining available for response to emergency calls, the distributed training model is a key component in supporting the Service Delivery Model.

January to March 2020 has seen teams from the Services Learning and People Development delivering continuous professional development sessions for station-based assessors. This supports command delivery in having the right number of suitably qualified people in the right place at the right time to ensure excellence in the delivery and assessment of competence in core emergency response activities.

From April 2020 onwards, Services Learning and People Development will be making use of available and emerging technology to provide further support to the workforce in training and assessment of emergency response activities. There is also proposed significant investment of Coventry hot fire training facility to ensure it is fit for the needs of a modern ambitious Fire Service.

This continued focus on providing high quality training facilities and ongoing development of staff will ensure we are delivering excellent services to the communities we serve and will help us maintain and improve on our HMICFRS outstanding rating for responding to fires and other emergencies.

Covid-19

To enable decision making in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, from 18 March 2020, the Strategic Enabling Team formally met several times a week, as a Business Continuity Management Team. They were supported in the implementation of revised service provision through a Business Continuity Planning Team, comprising a cohort of Middle Managers. The Service instigated business continuity plans, in readiness for the virus's potential to affect the activities that could be delivered by firefighters and support staff. In addition, the organisation adhered to the [Coronavirus Act 2020](#) to ensure the health and well-being of all employees. The Service committed to the national Tripartite Agreement enabling firefighters and support staff volunteers to implement the coordinated efforts of sustaining partner organisations and our communities during the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic occurred at the very end of the 2019/20 financial year and therefore its full impact is not reflected in this statement of assurance. The Authority response to the significant challenge that emerged will be reported in the Statement of Assurance 2020/21.