

Birmingham City Council

City Council

02 February 2021



Subject: Lead Member Report: West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

Report of: Cllr Zafar Iqbal, Lead Member

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? ☐ Yes ☒ No

1 Recommendation

- 1.1 That the report be noted.

2 Response to Covid-19 Pandemic

- 2.1 On the 18th March 2020, West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) formally implemented business continuity arrangements in response to COVID19 and in preparation of the expected announcement of a Major Incident across the West Midlands Conurbation.
- 2.2 A major incident was declared on the 20th March by West Midlands Police and the Strategic Enabling Team (SET) 'stood up' as the Business Continuity Management Team (BCMT), broadly based on the National Fire Chief Council (NFCC) 'Fire-Gold' structure which had been implemented to coordinate sector wide information in response to COVID19.
- 2.3 The Business Continuity Management Team continues to operate to the following strategic outcomes during this business continuity period:
1. Maximise the continuity of critical activities delivered to the most vulnerable across the West Midlands
 2. Support and lead the health and wellbeing of our staff
 3. Be a responsive partner across the Public Sector to protect vital services to our communities and proactively limit the spread of COVID 19
 4. Establish a 'new' normal with a healthy workforce

3 Delivery of core services

- 3.1 Prevention, Protection, Response and Prevention services have continued to develop during the pandemic to support effective delivery to our communities in a safe and effective way.

- 3.2 Response services have continued to be delivered as usual, with additional measures in place to ensure all staff are working in a safe environment.
- 3.3 Prevention and Protection services have adapted because of COVID19 and its existence in the community to enable delivery of these services in a tailored way to ensure they are available where needed and these services continue to be targeted to those most vulnerable to fire and other related incidents.
- 3.4 Where a premises has to be entered, pre-screening questionnaires are used and new methods such as a 'digital' fire safety audits are being developed with Safe and Well visits providing alternative approaches to enabling the delivery of core services at this current time.
- 3.5 All activities are risk assessed to ensure the safety of our communities and staff.
- 3.6 More recently as the COVID alert level has moved from 4 to 5, the Fire Service continues to operate within established COVID guidance and respond effectively to changes within this.

4 Key Performance Indicators (Birmingham)

Performance Indicator	Actual 2019/20	Target to end of Dec-20	Actual to end of Dec-20
The number of accidental fires in dwellings	709	529	554
The number of casualties from accidental fires in dwellings	26	22	9
The number of deliberate fires in dwellings	87	79	75
The number of accidental fires in non-domestic premises	179	141	100
The number of deliberate fires in non-domestic premises	55	54	54
The number of deliberate vehicle fires	255	224	183

The number of deliberate rubbish fires	511	449	304
The number of malicious false alarms calls received	217	N/A	144
The number of false alarm calls due to automatic fire alarms	2738	2052	1974
Number led to safety from fires with brigade assistance	100	N/A	111
Number of rescues from fires	13	N/A	23
Number of RTCs attended	1202	N/A	750
Number of extrications from RTCs	90	N/A	45

- 4.1 Response' incidents have continued overall to be below the three-year average and the current pandemic has impacted this when comparing performance to previous years. There has been no detrimental impact on appliance availability.
- 4.2 The Service has been at the forefront of the National Fire Chief Council's response to the pandemic providing a range of additional activities to support the response to tackling the Covid-19 pandemic in our communities.
- 4.3 WMFS's approach of requesting volunteers from existing members of staff to undertake any new activities agreed and requested locally continues to work well.
- 4.4 Some of the main areas of support provided through additional activities have been:
- The delivery of essential items
 - The operation of COVID – 19 Body Movement
 - Face mask fitting for NHS dentists
 - Drop and collect of swab testing kits.
- 4.5 Working with Birmingham City Council, WMFS has supported the provision of 'No Contact' letters alongside food packages. More recently, essential deliveries have been further supplemented by support for the 'track and trace'

system, where individuals have been in close contact with a positive COVID case but are uncontactable using remote methods such as phone calls, texts or emails.

- 4.6 WMFS has committed to support the establishment of Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) Centres across the West Midlands Local Authority (LA) areas and initial efforts have focused on supporting the pilot schemes which are delivering LFT to priority groups, including the NHS, care sector, West Midlands Police (WMP) and LA staff. Through our engagement, all WMFS staff are part of this priority group.

5 Financial Summary

- 5.1 Two Separate COVID related funding allocations amounting to £2.786M have been made by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to the Authority. The first, issued on 20th March 2020 was for £0.594M and the second, issued on 28th April 2020 was for £2.192M. COVID related expenditure incurred up to the end of December 2020 amounted to circa £2.9M.

6 Fire Authority arrangements

- 6.1 West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority has continued to operate within the aegis of the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) Regulations 2020.
- 6.2 Since the beginning of the pandemic the Authority has been holding regular briefings for members of the Fire Authority and since August 2020 briefings with the Chief Fire Officer operate through the Authority's usual Policy Planning Forum (PPF), which is a Member engagement forum, on a monthly basis. These briefings have continued to provide us with an overview of COVID business continuity services, as well as an overview of the recovery of usual business. I feel that this approach has been very successful, and it has ensured that Authority Members have been regularly updated and kept informed. During September/October Fire Authority meetings commenced alongside the continuation of statutory meetings which have been held via virtual platforms.
- 6.3 Fire Authority meetings other than statutory meetings, PPF and the February Authority and budget setting meeting have also been paused with the February Budget Setting meeting planned for 15th February 2021.
- 6.4 Finally, as Lead member for this council on the Fire Authority, and on behalf of all members, I would like to state my thanks to all WMFS staff, officers and fire fighters for their continued work and dedication to the communities that they serve during what has been an extremely challenging time for all.