Our quarterly Fire Authority Briefing Notes give us the opportunity to look back over the last three months and celebrate the hard work of our command area. It covers our priorities of response, prevention and protection focusing on how we help people have safer, healthier lives and how we tackle emergencies assertively, effectively and safely.

**FOREWORD**

**MATT YOUNG**

Black Country South Operations Commander

During the past three months our operational teams and support departments across Sandwell & Dudley areas have been proactive in delivering our services to target public safety and business growth as well as seeking opportunity to improve on our people development.

We have experienced an increase in some of our Key Performance Indicators - which we regularly monitor and use intelligence led data to forecast and plan interventions. Deliberate Derelict Fires, Injuries in Accidental Fires and Accidental Non-Domestic Fires have presented us with significant challenges and focus towards aligning our actions towards supporting those who most need us.

Working cohesively with our partner organisations have supported our activities and provided a joined up working approach, which provide added value to our communities needs and target our most vulnerable people and businesses. This has included the Safer Six campaign, addressing many issues around arson related crime, rogue landlords, youth services and many other areas affecting the six towns of Sandwell.

Our Partnership Team have provided several Continuous Professional Development events across the region to offer care provider agencies with an overview of our post-incident activities and multi-agency working, supporting the effectiveness of Serious Incident Reviews. We have also worked closely with Local Authority departments to obtain lists of over 700 derelict sites which we plan to visit as part of our Safe & Strong activities to ensure the management of security arrangements and sharing of risk with our Blue Light Partners.

Internal focus has offered us with an opportunity to ensure our workforce are supported and informed on improving the way the culture of our service is perceived and adopted. Working together we aim to continue to offer the communities of Sandwell & Dudley with the assurance of having an effective, innovative service, capable of achieving more than emergency response.
West Midlands Fire Service is committed to an average risk-based attendance time of 5 minutes. We know through academic studies on survivability that if we can get to someone within 5 minutes the chances of them surviving a significant incident increases.

Throughout July to September we have consistently over performed against our average risk-based attendance time, with the brigade average being 4 minutes and 41 seconds; which is really great news.

West Midlands Fire Service is the only Fire & Rescue Service inspected to-date by HMICFRS to receive outstanding for the response element of the service.

Our response priorities focus on dealing excellently with emergency incidents:

- through risk management, the most serious emergency incidents in high-risk areas will be attended within five minutes, to save life, protect homes and businesses, and keep our transport networks moving
- risk to life and property will be reduced through our commitment to operational excellence, enabling an assertive, effective and safe emergency response to all incidents whilst supporting firefighter safety
- at all incidents attended, rescue operations will be led and coordinated by WMFS whilst working collaboratively with other agencies to deliver an excellent response and meet public expectations
- National Resilience will be enhanced through delivery of a local, national and international response to major incidents, new risks and humanitarian situations through our specialist response teams.

Fire Authority Briefing Note
Black Country South Q2

Fire Control are the resources managers for both Staffordshire and West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service and receive all the emergency 999 calls for both services.

Between April and September Fire Control received a total of 37,175 calls; 71% of these calls were attributed to West Midlands Fire Service and 29% to Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

A key performance measure within Fire Control is the speed in which they mobilise a fire engine to a serious incident e.g. a house fire; impressively throughout April to September Fire Controls average time to mobilise to a house fire was 58 seconds.

999Eye is a tool which we use to get ‘eyes on’ to an incident though the mobile phone of those who are reporting the incident; 999Eye a critical asset in how we use intelligence, such as mobile phone footage, to ensure we mobilise the right resources. 999Eye has been used an impressive 3000 times since April 2019.
In July there was a large fire in a disused warehouse in Smethwick. At the height of the fire there were 15 fire engines along with a specialist high volume pump and an aerial appliance dealing with the incident.

Crews worked effectively to stop the fire from spreading to adjoining units including a nearby clothing factory with high fire loading.

Rolfe Street was closed for 24 hours and fire crews were at scene throughout that period due to the severity of the fire and the dangerous state of the building.

It is believed that the fire started accidentally due to contractors in an adjacent building burning off rubbish.

In August an ice cream van caught fire that was parked on the pavement next to shops on Cape Hill. The fire quickly spread to 2 shops and the 1st and 2nd floor flats above. Luckily there was no-one in the flats at the time of the fire.

Crews managed to quickly extinguish the fire though the damage to the shops was extensive.

Crews later carried out Safe & Strong checks to remind shop owners to keep pavements clear of anything flammable including vehicles.

On 12th August, crews were mobilised via Careline to an incident with reports of a 76 year old woman who had set her hair alight. Following further questioning from Fire Control it was realised that the fire had affected all of her upper body.

Crews gave first aid and treated her burns until the arrival of paramedics. Unfortunately, she died on 29th August as a result of her injuries and further complications.

She suffered from pre-existing medical conditions including vascular dementia and a lung condition that required her to use a nebulizer. She was referred to us for a Safe & Well visit at the beginning of this year. She smoked heavily and was seen by one of our Vulnerable Person Officers. She smoked in bed and was advised of the dangers of smoking in her chair and advised her not to. She was resistant to this as she had very poor mobility. As a result of this she was issued with a fire-retardant throw.

Our fire investigation team have confirmed that the fire was caused through careless handling of cigarettes which set fire to her clothing. The fire-retardant throw was not being used at the time.

A serious Incident Review is underway with partners to try to identify any learning from this tragic event.
PREPAREDNESS

West Midlands Fire Service are committed to undertaking 104 large exercises every year; these exercises test our response and procedures to a variety of complex incidents in some of our high risk premises.

Black Country South organised and delivered 5 exercises during Q2. These ranged from large building fires to an industrial accident at the Midland Metropolitan Hospital and dealing with a CBRNe incident at Russell’s Hall Hospital.

MIDLAND METROPOLITAN HOSPITAL

A large scale multi-agency exercise was held at the new West Midlands Metropolitan Hospital site. The scenario was of a crane operator suffering a medical emergency leading to the dropping of the crane load. 15 on site staff volunteered as casualties, including rope access specialist who were rescued from height by Technical Rescue, HART paramedics and operational crews using PRL equipment to support. We were able to engage the services of a professional make-up artist who simulated open fractures, crush injuries and lacerations, as well as severe burns from the explosion that was simulated. Balfour Beatie were able to practice their emergency response and feedback form all involved was that the chance to work together including the on site staff across a large property was invaluable.
Our prevention work focuses on reducing people's vulnerability to the type of emergencies to which we respond.

Our firefighters carry out thousands of 'Safe and Well' visits every year, and our crews give advice on health and wellbeing where it will reduce the risk of a fire. This means vulnerable people are safer in their own homes and we can get them extra help if they need it.

We also provide fire safety education in hundreds of schools and colleges and at our interactive 'Safeside' learning centres in Handsworth and Eastside, as well as at public events and through our popular Fire Cadets programme.

Our prevention priorities focus on making safer, healthier communities:

- the number of people killed or seriously injured by fire related incidents will reduce as we focus, with our partners, on reducing the risks faced by the most vulnerable people in our communities
- the safety, health and well-being of the most vulnerable people in our communities will improve by targeting 'radical prevention' interventions that are directly linked to vulnerability from fire
- arson-related incidents will fall, supporting safer and stronger communities, as a result of our partnership working
- fewer people will be killed or seriously injured on West Midlands roads and we will keep our transport networks moving, as we work with the West Midlands Combined Authority and other organisations to develop and deliver interventions that support the West Midlands Regional Road Safety Strategy.

Black Country South are trialling a new software system called Tymly. The majority of our Safe & Wells are delivered through this system which is web based and customer focused. We are looking to develop this system and improve our partner engagement.

Crews from across Black Country South have been working with Partner agencies within both Sandwell and Dudley to keep our communities safe. This is not just safe from fire but also focuses on anti-social behaviour, violence, well-being, road safety and crime.

Tymly™
The launch of Sandwell’s Autumn Safer 6 campaign was held at Haden Cross Fire Station along with an Open Day on 7th September. Partner organisations targeted their efforts and provided extra reassurance as the nights draw in – a time when crime and anti-social behaviour can often rise.

This builds on their close work together, day in, day out throughout the year through the Safer Sandwell Partnership to make Sandwell a safer and cleaner place to live and work.

The 10th annual Safer 6 campaign ran for six weeks starting on Saturday 7 September. Each town had a focus week with many activities and events. The Fire service took part in many of these events including joint activities with other agencies including West Midlands Police, Sandwell Neighbourhood teams and Trading Standards. An evaluation of the weeks activities is in the process of being collated.

This was a multi agency event held across multiple locations within Dudley, local councillors, trading standards and voluntary groups targeted the local communities that are vulnerable to loan sharks. This involved events at local community groups and shops in the Gornal and Lower Gornal wards. These two wards are also our highest in terms of accidental dwelling fires so we were also able to not only assist in the loan shark event but also target those vulnerable or at risk at having a fire in their home.

Above: WCdr Partridge and Sharky give advice to some local shoppers.
Top centre: Ian Baker from Oldbury’s S.E.N Fire Cadets along with William Sheldon (9) enjoying themselves at the Autumn Safer 6 launch at Haden Cross Fire Station.
Our protection work focuses on helping businesses to thrive, making the West Midlands stronger. We assess high-risk buildings including residential high-rises to ensure public safety and provide reassurance about the risks of fire.

We also advise companies how best to comply with fire safety legislation, to keep staff and customers safe.

If fire does strike, we help them to get back up and running as soon as possible. As a large organisation ourselves, we know the importance of business continuity.

Our protection priorities focus on protecting life and property to make businesses stronger and communities safer:

• life and property will be protected by targeting high-risk buildings and vulnerable businesses, including residential high-rises, to ensure compliance and enforcement of fire safety legislation
• improved community safety through implementing outcomes of the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety
• improved community safety through innovative and contemporary approaches to the delivery of protection activities and working cohesively with partners at local, regional and national levels to influence the development of new and enabling legislation
• prosperity and economic growth are enhanced by educating and supporting businesses, including collaboration with other regulators and partner agencies
• disruption to businesses, communities and West Midlands Fire Service caused by unwanted fire signals from fire alarms will be reduced.

ARROW RECYCLING, SMETHWICK

This is a large property that recycles plastic, paper and cardboard with a very high fire loading.

A multi agency intervention took place at this property with Sandwell Council, West Midlands Police, Border Agency, HMRC, West Midlands Fire Service Fire Safety Officers and other enforcement agencies.

The intervention took place because of Health & Safety breaches, Modern Day Slavery and other concerns.

Because of serious breaches in Fire Safety we served a prohibition notice on the owner. This was lifted following extensive work carried out by the owner however an Enforcement Notice has been issued to carry out further work to ensure the safety of the employees.
A multi agency inspection took place with Hope 4 Justice, WM Police and Environmental Health at shops on Blackheath High St as part of Sandwell Autumn Safer 6.

A prohibition took place on an Asian sweet shop that had multiple fire safety issues along with environmental health issues including open sewer pipes in the kitchen.

The building had evidence of previous fires and there was no fire alarm or safe escape route from the upstairs sleeping accommodation.

Our Fire Safety officers prohibited the use of both the 1st and 2nd floors and other agencies are continuing with their investigations.

Moving forwards, we will continue to target our resources to those who need us most. This will include analysing our effectiveness to react to emergency calls using our newly installed Fire Turnout systems which aide in the process of alerting our Fire Crews to the type of incident they are attending, in addition to notifying them of Prevention activities like Safe & Well visits.

I look forward to receiving the analysis of the effectiveness of the Safer 6 campaign and use the relevant information to further direct our activities towards supporting the efforts of both the West Midlands Fire Service and partner agencies to bring improvements to our communities and support economic growth of businesses.

We are encouraged to see that many significant retail agencies are deciding to remove the sale of fireworks from their stores and support attendance at Local Authority run events.

This quarter will see the launch of our Winter Warmth safety campaign. We have utilised historic data to anticipate the high use of heating and electrical appliances during this period and will take the opportunity to support safety in homes by offering free equipment - which will benefit families and the elderly. Our fire crews will be delivering Cold Home and safety advice during visits across Sandwell and Dudley to offer brief interventions which are aimed to mitigate against the number of accidental house fires we have previously experienced during winter months.

In addition, our service wide project is enabling our management teams and staff members to work cohesively to release added value to our communities during activities which will benefit those most vulnerable from fire and improve our brand.