Welcome to ‘Our Plan’.

Our Plan forms part of West Midlands Fire Service’s (WMFS) rolling three-year strategy. It is an opportunity to reflect on the last year and look at our priorities for the next three years to ensure we make the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier.

Covid Impacts
As we emerge from the devastating impact of the coronavirus pandemic, there has never been a more poignant time to reflect on that journey over the last 12 months. 2020/2021 has undoubtedly been one of the most challenging and transformational years WMFS has ever faced.

An ‘Outstanding Response’
While our outstanding emergency response continued as normal throughout the pandemic and the majority of serious incidents were attended in under five minutes, all other areas of the Service had to swiftly flex and adapt ways of working. Evolving government guidance and announcements meant staff had to meet challenges head on, ensuring the most vulnerable were front and centre to every decision made.

This was later reflected in Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) report that praised our new ways of working and our ‘innovative’ use of technology which enabled flexible and efficient home working and allowed for the continuation and adaptation of critical prevention and protection activities.

Strengthening Partnerships
One of the outcomes of the pandemic was the strengthening of existing partnerships and the many new partnerships formed. These will prove vital to future collaborative projects and initiatives with local councils and other emergency services, in supporting those most vulnerable in our communities.

Three Core Elements For The Future
There are three core elements that underpin much of our role as a fire service - our people, value for money and our digital approach. Staff culture, values and behaviours are at the very core of our service delivery. Regardless of role, we want all staff to understand how significant their contribution is and how it fits in to the bigger picture in terms of helping us to achieve our priorities.

We must ensure we recruit and retain the best staff to deliver services within a balanced budget while seeking out more efficient ways of developing and transforming what we do without compromising public safety or performance. With the full economic impact of COVID-19 yet to be realised, we know the next few years are going to be extremely challenging.

Our focus on digital transformation has been the cornerstone to our delivery of services, certainly during the pandemic. Across many parts of the Service digital change arrived much faster than we could have imagined but the positive outcomes of that have been far reaching. We’re now proud to say that we can deliver some of our services just as well digitally.

Transforming our delivery of services that are fit for the future, will mean investing in digital approaches to create efficiencies in the longer term which will support ‘smarter’ ways of working. Over the next year we will be looking to better understand how and why data and technology can improve the services we provide, efficiency and performance. This delivery will, of course, only be possible with the continued commitment of our greatest asset - our workforce. A workforce that, against a backdrop of continuous change and significant financial challenges, remains ready, willing and able to play a major part in helping to ensure the people of the West Midlands live safer, healthier lives.
We set out our priorities and objectives in ‘Our Plan’. It’s a rolling, three-year document which covers things like reducing serious traffic accidents, helping people have safer, healthier lives and making sure we tackle emergencies assertively, effectively and safely.

We are the second largest fire and rescue service in the country, serving seven local authority areas (Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton councils).

We identify and analyse risks across the West Midlands, and use the information to come up with our Community Risk Management Plan to decide where we need our fire stations, firefighters and vehicles. It also helps us plan how we deliver our full range of services which we split into...

**Response**

**Prevention**

**Protection**

The West Midlands has a diverse and multi-cultural population. It includes areas with the highest risk in England outside of London, presenting a range of socio-economic and health and wellbeing challenges.
The role of a fire service and a firefighter is to understand and manage risk to communities and the brigade, in the delivery of its services. We identify this through our Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

We continually review our risk assessment using an evidence-based approach to identify the annual priorities and three-year objectives and to make sure we are meeting the changing needs of our communities. Tackling the ‘causes of the causes’ issues that make people more vulnerable to harm from fire, as well as forecasting future risk to meet our Response, Prevention and Protection objectives will be the ongoing focus in the development of our CRMP.

Over the last 12 months, we’ve utilised every hurdle, success and experience in order to adapt, learn, evolve and plan more effectively for the future. This informs not only our role locally to communities, but also our influence within the National Fire Chiefs Council to develop CRMP and adopt digital transformation throughout the fire sector.

While we don’t fully know what lies beyond the pandemic, what we can say with certainty is that WMFS will continue to put its communities front and centre to ensure we deliver an assertive, effective and safe service.

Know what’s happening where you live and work with WMNow.

WMNow is a free community messaging system that delivers up to date information from fire and partners direct to your inbox.

From updates on fires, to local news and events, and safety advice, don’t miss out on information that’s important to you - sign up now at www.wmnow.co.uk

WMNow helps keep thousands of people across the West Midlands up to date with regular community alerts.
We have an excellent track record with regard to increasing public safety and working collaboratively with other agencies and organisations.

This is achieved through the dedication and professionalism of our firefighters who respond assertively, effectively and safely to numerous incidents on a daily basis. Our commitment to our risk-based, five-minute attendance standard is at the heart of our delivery to our communities. This is supported through an evidence-based approach which is contained in our Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

In our last national inspection by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, our response delivery among our communities was graded as ‘Outstanding’.

We continue to work with partners, academics and health colleagues to carry out research to ensure our early response creates the best outcomes for our communities with regard to all incidents.

We will aim to get to incidents within our attendance standards across all categories; within five minutes in high-risk areas, to save life, reduce harm and protect homes and businesses.

We will lead rescue operations and work collaboratively with partners to deliver an effective response.

We will deliver a local, national and international response to major incidents, new risks and humanitarian situations, through our firefighters and specialist teams.

In turn, this gives us the capacity to deliver our equally important and collaborative prevention and protection work with the most vulnerable across the West Midlands.

Our response services protect lives, properties and ensure businesses remain in business and help keep the West Midlands’ transport networks flowing.

We continue to utilise digital technology to enhance our service with 999eye helping us to match our response to the type of emergency.

Further afield, we support the UK-wide emergency approach, through being a key part of the National Resilience arrangements. The skills and expertise of our staff can be called upon to help people in the UK or around the world who are affected by major incidents or humanitarian crises.

In 2020/21 our Fire Control handled 45,027 calls, in an average of 76 seconds per call.

Our firefighters attended 25,216 incidents and they arrived at the most serious in an average of just 4 minutes 32 secs.
As well as responding to fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies, firefighters at two of our 38 fire stations form our Technical Rescue Unit (TRU).

TRU’s rescue expertise can be called upon at a wide variety of incidents, such as rescuing people from collapsed buildings, floods, height or confined spaces.

Many members of TRU volunteer with colleagues from throughout our organisation to respond on behalf of the UK Government to scenes of international crisis, under the banner of UK International Search and Rescue.

They have been deployed to some of the world’s most devastating disaster areas.

People who use their smartphone to call us on 999 could now also be asked to send photos or videos of what they can see.

We came up with the idea of ‘999Eye’ and developed it with Capita.

It has been used more than 9,245 times to help operators in our Fire Control ensure that the most appropriate resources are sent to incidents. You should still always call 999 in an emergency. But now our Fire Control staff have the option, once initial resources have been mobilised, to text you a secure link so you can send us images of the incident.

Preparing, training and testing how we operate is 24/7 business at our 38 fire stations.

We completed 46 large–scale training exercises during 2020/21 – that’s nearly 1 a week!

These are often with colleagues from other organisations like the police, ambulance service and West Midlands councils.
Our prevention priorities focus on safer and healthier communities:

• We will work with our partners to reduce fire related risks faced by the most vulnerable in our communities.
• We will improve the safety, health and well-being of the most vulnerable people in our communities, through targeted prevention activities directly linked to vulnerability from fire.
• We will educate to prevent arson related incidents, supporting safer and stronger communities through our partnership working.
• We will reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads through education and prevention, working with strategic partners.
• We will work in partnership to support and protect the most vulnerable in our communities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Our prevention work aims to reduce people's vulnerability to the type of emergencies to which we respond.

Our firefighters carry out thousands of ‘Safe and Well’ visits every year, with a focus on helping our more vulnerable residents to be safer at home.

They give advice on subjects including health and wellbeing where it will reduce the risk of a fire, and can get them extra help if they need it.

Our strong partnerships with colleagues and organisations in other sectors help us to identify and support people who are at higher risk from fires and other emergencies.

We give practical help to smokers and to people living with dementia. We help others to overcome loneliness and social isolation. And, if it’s appropriate, we can advise on how to avoid having a fall, so people can leave their homes safely in an emergency.

But our prevention work extends well beyond the home. We provide fire and road safety education in hundreds of schools and colleges and at our two interactive ‘Safeside’ learning centres in Birmingham, as well as at public events and through our popular Fire Cadets programme.

We also have specialist prevention and partnership teams who support our firefighters to build links in the local community, reduce anti-social behaviour, including arson, and improve road safety.

Don’t forget, if you would like updates on fires, local news and events, sign up with WMNow at www.wmnow.co.uk
Our Education Team have been busy during the lockdown, developing new ways for delivering our programmes to support our visitor experiences and engagement for schools and organisations.

We have been developing some new digital approaches and online resources for maintaining our engagement and programme delivery, utilising the National Fire Chiefs Council national platform ‘Stay Wise’ as well as Home Learning Resources.

Smart Live, a new resource developed for our primary schools, is a live stream programme which enables our Safeside Village to offer a range of messages covering road, outdoor, fire, and personal safety.

The delivery of our programmes led by our firefighters into schools, will commence in the Autumn Term 2021.

We are looking forward to engaging with our schools and Partner Organisations so please visit the WMFS website to find more details and how to book.

Although 944 people were killed or seriously injured on West Midlands roads in 2020/21…

…this was down nearly 10.9% from 2018/19.

Our firefighters and Road Casualty Reduction Team engaged digitally with 3,599 children and young people, delivering key road safety messages.

We know that some of the most vulnerable people on our roads are aged 17 to 25. We use virtual reality video to help young drivers and car passengers understand the consequences of choices they take at the wheel.

We attended 89 derelict buildings fires in 2020/21.

Our Fire Investigation and Prevention Section (FIPS) were involved in 162 fire investigations, and inquiries into 27 fire related deaths because of accidents, unlawful killings and suicides. Their detailed and painstaking work assisted West Midlands Police in 59 arson fires, helping to secure successful convictions in a number of cases.

Our fire investigation dog (and his handler!) were deployed to incidents across our region 23 times.
Our protection work is all about protecting life and property, making businesses and the economy stronger, and communities safer.

We inspect high-risk and tall buildings, including residential flats, hospitals, schools and vulnerable businesses, to keep safe and reassure the people who live and work there.

We also advise companies on fire safety legislation, to keep their staff and customers safe and help their businesses to grow.

Our 'Safe and Strong' visits include advice on how to prevent a fire (including arson) happening in the first place, to protect your staff, buildings and contents. We’ll also signpost you to helpful; and free business continuity resources.

And we work with other regulators and partner agencies to support major developments and events.

We are continually developing digital ways to engage with partner agencies and business owners.

Our specialist fire safety officers are supported by our business support officers and firefighters. We work with the owners and managers of tall buildings to ensure that the new Fire Safety Bill and guidance is understood and acted upon.

If you’re responsible for fire safety in a building, it’s important you understand and stay within the law. We do our very best to advise on where improvements can be made. But we do take enforcement action if necessary.

Our Business Support Vehicles help to bring down the number of unnecessary fire alarms and the disruption they cause. This is complemented by our staff in Fire Control using a system known as ‘call challenge’ to check whether or not we actually need to respond, or if it’s a false alarm.

With our partners – local, regional and national - we work to influence the development of new legislation.

In 2020/21 we recorded 326 accidental fires in non-domestic properties.

We have three vehicles and a team dedicated to bringing down the number of ‘unwanted fire signals’ from automatic fire alarms.

We attended 5,629 false alarms caused by fire alarm systems.
In 2020/21 we carried out 2,596 ‘Safe and Strong’ visits providing advice to businesses regarding fire prevention and protecting staff, buildings and contents.

Anyone with any degree of control over premises is responsible for the safety of anyone who may be affected by a fire. You can be fined or jailed if you don’t ensure people’s safety.

It’s our business to help businesses and other organisations keep their staff, residents, visitors and buildings safe from fire.

We do our very best to give clear advice, and to identify where improvements can be made.

However, in the most serious incidents we take enforcement action or we may issue a Simple Caution which is kept on record by our Fire Authority for two years.

A number of fire risk assessment guides are available online at www.gov.uk.

The results of a suitable and sufficient risk assessment will help you to:

- identify any fire hazards
- reduce the risk of hazards causing harm
- decide what physical fire precautions and management arrangements are necessary to ensure people’s safety if there’s a fire.

Fire alarms going off when there’s no fire can cost your business money.

They can also mean our firefighters responding unnecessarily when they might be needed for a real emergency somewhere else.

We have three vehicles and a team dedicated to bringing down the number of ‘unwanted fire signals’ from automatic fire alarms, through business engagement, education and support.