



OUR PLAN

2023-2026

EVERYTHING.
CONNECTED



WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE

On these pages, we share out priorities which support our vision:

“Making the West Midlands safer, stronger and healthier”

Everything we do is connected to our vision.



COUNCILLOR GREG BRACKENRIDGE

Chair of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority



WAYNE BROWN

Chief Fire Officer



OUR PLAN 2023-2026



FOREWORD

Welcome to Our Plan.

On these pages we share our priorities which support our vision of 'Making the West Midlands safer, stronger and healthier'.

Everything we do is connected to our vision. Our highly-trained staff aim to deliver the best fire, rescue, and risk reduction services - an aim which has our communities at heart, helping them to stay safe and thrive.

We continue to build upon the outcomes of our public consultation held in 2020. In 2022/23 we continued to take great strides in developing our Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), exploring how we can deliver our services in the best possible way and maximise the effectiveness of how we use our staff and resources, increasing our capacity and capability to respond to existing and emerging risks.

The year, 2023/24, will be a pivotal one, in which we will move to implement our CRMP developments into new ways of working.

Importantly, it will also be a year in which we reach out to you - our communities, businesses, partners and our staff - and ask you to take part in our three-yearly public consultation. This is your opportunity to let us know how we are doing and to share feedback to help shape our services of the future.

In 2022 we were a key partner in the delivery of the Commonwealth Games, which were such a huge success for Birmingham and the wider West Midlands region. Our work led to us being awarded 'Emergency Service Collaboration of the Year' at the Excellence in Fire Awards.

We were honoured to host the United Kingdom Rescue Organisation (UKRO) 'Festival of Rescue'. Hundreds of firefighters from across the UK and beyond competed to be crowned 'best of the best' in a range of rescue skills. The event was also a great opportunity for fire and rescue services (FRSs) to strengthen their working ties and learn from one another. If you were among the thousands who came to watch, thank you! We hope you enjoyed seeing what your highly-trained firefighters are capable of.

It is with great pride that we can report that our latest inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services

(HMICFRS) saw us maintain our grade of 'outstanding' for response to fire and other emergencies, and receive the same grading for our overall effectiveness.

We are one of only two FRSs to be graded as outstanding in 'understanding fires and other risks'.

We also improved our grading in both 'promoting the right values and cultures' and 'managing performance and developing leaders'.



This latest assessment reflects the great strides that have been made in every aspect of our work. However, our work is not complete. Our ability to innovate and continuously improve is at the core of what we do.



Wayne Brown, Chief Fire Officer

It is clear from news reporting and independent reviews in 2022 and 2023 that the fire and rescue sector continues to face a problem with culture and behaviours. There are still people working in our sector who do not represent the values of the service, and some staff continue to suffer bullying, harassment and discrimination. This is completely unacceptable. Where we find evidence of such behaviour we will act swiftly and decisively to root it out. We are fully committed to being an inclusive, rewarding and safe place for anyone to work and to be their true selves.

This is one of the reasons we are so proud and honoured that West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) has been ranked number one in The Inclusive Top 50 UK Employers list 2022/23. It is an achievement that reflects the ongoing and outstanding work achieved throughout our service, by all of our teams and staff stakeholder groups who remain so invested in making it happen. We will continue to build upon what we have achieved, including the adoption of the new Core Code of Ethics for the fire sector, placing our values and behaviours at the very centre of everything we do.

Our Plan recognises that when our people feel that WMFS is a great place to work, it is our communities who benefit.



OUR PLAN 2023-2026



FOREWORD CONTINUED

So, for the first time, our three-year rolling strategy and Our Plan include a particular focus on:

- people - where we are continuing to develop and improve the culture within the service, ensuring connectivity at every level. We are making sure that we are setting all our staff up to succeed through further development of career pathways and training
- professionalism - with an increased focus on standards and a review of training, including our Trainee Firefighter Development Programme, staff competency and Incident Command
- pride - in our service, ensuring the appropriate focus is given to the effective use of our estate including the completion of our Headquarters transformation, appliances and equipment, and standards of appearance.

Our commitment to delivering value for money remains one of the core elements of how we deliver our strategic priorities.

“ The amount of money we raise through Council Tax (our 'precept') is among the lowest fire service charges in England. We have raised it by £4.99 for 2023/24, in line with flexibility afforded by central government. The increase will help us meet significant inflationary pressures which have pushed up the cost of energy, fuel, vehicles and equipment - all central to our service delivery. ”

Councillor Greg Brackenridge, Chair

We recognise that inflation is also affecting the people we serve so, in 2023/24, we will remain committed both to further improving our efficiency and productivity, and to targeting our services to support the vulnerable in our communities who feel the cost-of-living crisis most.

OUR VALUES



We make a difference every day. Our community focus makes the West Midlands safer, stronger and healthier.



We create an open and honest culture that enables our people to thrive. We prioritise wellbeing and treat one another with integrity, dignity, and respect.



We are all positive role models and accountable for upholding the highest standards in performance and behaviour.



We continually recognise and promote the value of diversity, inclusion, cohesion and equality, both within our service and the communities we serve. We stand united against all forms of discrimination.



We have a passion for progress and are fearless in our pursuit of innovation and improvement, always striving to make tomorrow a little better than today.

OUR PLAN 2023-2026



INTRODUCTION

Everything we do is guided by our vision of making the West Midlands safer, stronger and healthier.

Our highly-trained staff aim to deliver the best fire, rescue and risk reduction services which have our communities at heart - helping them to stay safe and to thrive.

We are the second largest fire and rescue service in England, serving an area of 902km² and covering seven local authority areas: Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

The West Midlands is home to a diverse and multi-cultural population of more than 2.9 million people, living in 1,190,943 homes. There are 101,760 non-domestic properties.

It includes areas with the highest risk in England outside of London, presenting a range of socio-economic and health and wellbeing challenges.

Through our community risk management planning, we assess risks our communities might face. It is the foundation of our three-year rolling strategy and priorities which, together, form 'Our Plan'.

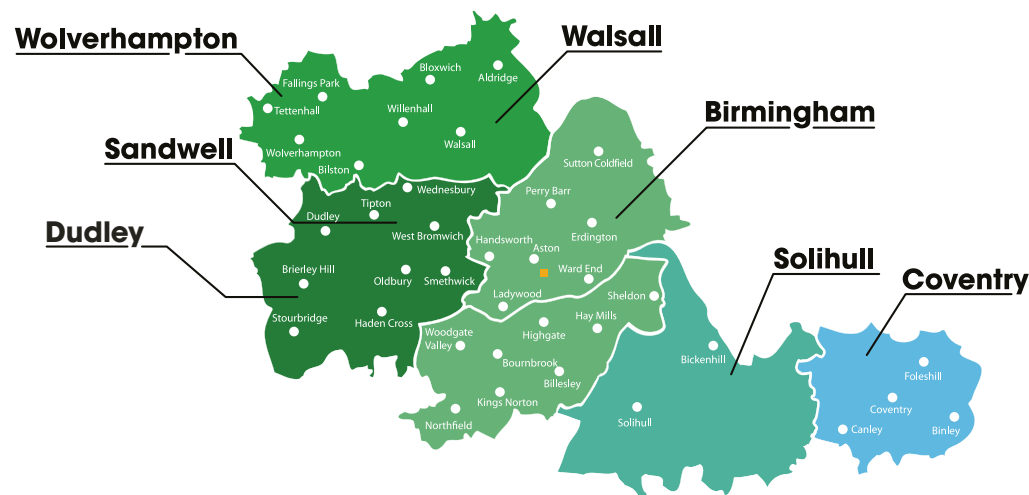
Our Plan shapes how we deliver our services and how we locate and use our resources to reduce risk and vulnerability.

The priorities set out in Our Plan 2022-2025 have resulted in many changes to the way we deliver our services, with some very positive outcomes:

- during the extreme heat of Summer 2022, we were able to use our people and resources more flexibly thanks to our Risk-Based Crewing (RBC) approach and mix of vehicle types. This allowed them to deal with the large number of fires and other incidents over a short period much more efficiently
- we opened our third Technical Rescue Unit, in Sutton Coldfield. This has not only increased the number of staff we have with specialist technical skills, but also supported a significant increase in female and staff from BAME (Black or Asian Minority Ethnic) backgrounds into this field of work

- our new, flexible RBC approach to how we respond to incidents means our crews have been able to carry out more prevention and protection activities. This has been complemented by supporting, through our Safe and Well visits, those within our communities who are most at risk
- our revised approach to Automatic Fire Alarms has seen us reduce the number of occasions a fire engine is sent to what turns out to be a false alarm. Smaller vehicles are used more often, keeping other resources available to respond to actual emergencies.

In this, the third year of our formal three-year planning cycle, we continue to focus and build on the work of the last two years whilst continuing to monitor and review the risks our communities face every day.



OUR PLAN 2023-2026 RESPONSE



DEALING EXCELLENTLY WITH INCIDENTS

Our response to fires and other emergencies continued to be graded 'outstanding' by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. We were delighted that our understanding of risk of fire and other emergencies, and overall effectiveness, were also rated 'outstanding' for the first time.

This result highlights how our professional, full-time firefighters respond assertively, effectively and safely to a wide variety of incidents, 24/7. They protect lives and properties, keep businesses in business and help keep the West Midlands' transport networks flowing.

In 2022/23 our Fire Control handled 56,621 calls, in an average of 98 seconds per call. Our fire crews attended 26,084 incidents and arrived at the most serious in an average of just 4 minutes 48 seconds.

Based on evidence and our knowledge of risk, we know that our five-minute attendance standard for serious incidents in high-risk areas saves lives and protects homes and businesses.

This also helps us plan where we need our people and resources, including our fire stations, engines and more specialist resources. In turn, this gives us the capacity to deliver our equally important prevention and protection work to the West Midlands' most vulnerable.

We have an excellent record of increasing public safety and working collaboratively with other agencies and organisations, including during major incidents. We ensure that we draw learning from major national incidents, reports and inquiries, such as the Grenfell Inquiry and the Manchester Arena Bombing Inquiry. 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.

Further afield, we play a key role in supporting the UK-wide emergency approach and 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, such as the devastating earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, and flooding in Malawi, in early 2023.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

We will:

- respond with the resources you need, when you need them, to protect what matters to you, to save life, reduce harm and protect homes and businesses
- be ready to respond in an assertive, effective and safe way to meet our vision
- lead rescue operations, working with others to help make you safer
- be ready to respond locally, nationally and internationally.



OUR PLAN 2023-2026 PREVENTION



DELIVERING INTERVENTIONS WHICH SUPPORT SAFER AND HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES

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

Firefighters carry out thousands of 'Safe and Well' visits every year. They give advice to our more vulnerable residents to help reduce the risk of fire - to smokers or people living with dementia, for example - and can get them extra support from partners if needed.

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 carried out more than 31,000 'Safe and Well' visits in 2022/23, of which 13,629 originated from partner referrals. We also handed out 12,056 pieces of equipment such as smoke alarms, alarms for people with impaired hearing and fire-retardant bedding.

But our prevention work extends well beyond the home. We provide fire and road safety education to hundreds of schools and colleges and at our interactive 'Safeside' learning centre in Birmingham, as well as at public events and through our popular Fire Cadets programme. Our WMFS volunteers support and add value to the delivery of many of these education programmes.

Our highly-regarded fire investigation team provides valuable information about the causes of fires. This helps us to ensure that we understand risks and target our resources effectively. The team also conduct investigations for other fire and rescue services.

Specialist prevention and partnership teams support our firefighters with building strong community links to reduce anti-social behaviour, including arson.

We know that some of the most vulnerable road users are aged 17 to 29. That's why our firefighters and Road Casualty Reduction Team deliver key road safety messages to children and work with young drivers and passengers to help them understand the consequences of choices made at the wheel.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

We will:

- prevent fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies
- focus on reducing health inequalities for our most vulnerable as a means of reducing risk and vulnerability to fires and other emergencies
- educate the community to reduce their risk and vulnerability to fires and other emergencies
- collaborate and work in partnership with other organisations to reduce the risk and vulnerability to fires and other emergencies.



OUR PLAN 2023-2026 PROTECTION



PROTECTING LIFE AND PROPERTY TO MAKE BUSINESSES STRONGER AND COMMUNITIES SAFER

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. Where necessary we can go further and take enforcement action, including prosecution where we feel the risk is significant.

In 2022/23 we carried out 8,510 'Safe and Strong' visits, giving advice to businesses about fire prevention and protecting staff, buildings and contents. Our specialist fire safety inspectors are supported by our fire safety advisors and firefighters.

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 we need to respond, or if it's a false alarm.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

We will:

- protect our communities by targeting high-risk buildings through intelligence and data
- promote economic growth through education and engagement with businesses
- carry out our responsibilities under relevant legislation to consult and enforce to make people safer
- reduce disruption to businesses and communities of West Midlands



OUR PLAN 2023-2026

PEOPLE



HOW DO WE DO IT

Our People Plan recognises that when our people feel that WMFS is a great place to work, it is our communities who benefit.

How we engage and treat our people is a key focus for the Government and Home Office. 'People' is a key area of our national inspection process.

We are pleased that we maintained an overall rating of 'good' during our most recent inspection, while improving how well we promote values and culture, manage performance and develop our leaders from 'requires improvement' to 'good'.

OUR PEOPLE PRIORITIES

We are committed to working together to make WMFS a great place to work for our people and for the benefit of our community, by:

- recruiting, developing and championing talented people, enabling diversity and embracing difference, enabling them to reach their potential
- enabling a positive working environment for all our staff and holding all to account for maintaining our core values
- enabling and developing leaders at all levels by having a clear development and career pathway
- valuing the contribution of all our people, allowing everybody's voice to be heard
- ensuring our people know that their health, safety and wellbeing is important and will be prioritised by themselves and the service
- being uncompromising in our commitment to diversity, inclusion, cohesion and equality, ensuring the service is representative of our community and we have access to the widest talent pool
- creating an environment of personal growth and development which will ensure the service can continually adapt and improve.



OUR PLAN 2023-2026 DIGITAL



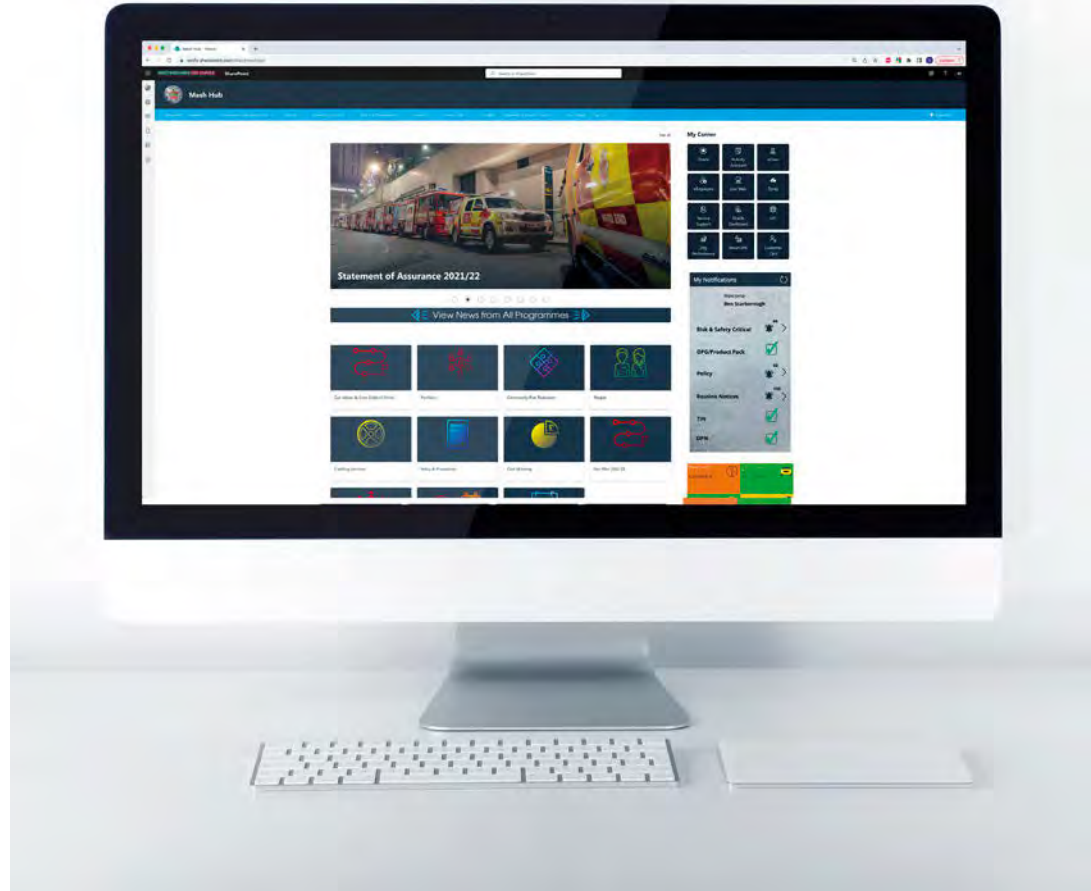
HOW DO WE DO IT

Our digital approach is focused on providing intelligent services to our communities through our digitally-empowered workforce.

OUR DIGITAL AND DATA PRIORITIES

We will enhance and transform services to our communities, underpinning them with innovative and digital solutions, enabling the delivery of our strategy by:

- enabling our workforce to have the best, most up-to-date information to keep them and our communities safe
- ensuring that we are as efficient and effective as we can be
- sharing data with other 'blue light' services and our partners, to ensure better outcomes for our communities
- engaging with our diverse communities in new ways, to help them remain informed and to stay safe.



OUR PLAN 2023-2026



COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

Our Community Risk Management Plan is how we assess all the current and future risks facing our communities. This influences how we set our priorities and, in turn, helps us determine what specific projects we need to implement to address these risks.

Our planning considers the views and needs of our communities, our partners and, of course, our staff. Some 11,000 people took part in our last public consultation in 2020.

Our research and data help us understand who and what is most at risk from fire and other incidents, and when and where they happen.

We gather evidence to help us better match our levels of response to different types of incidents.

We also consider the wider risks facing the West Midlands, how our partners prepare for and respond to these, and what our contribution can be, especially through key partnerships like the Local Resilience Forum.

More of the incidents to which we respond - or might in the future - are influenced by things like climate change or national projects, such as the HS2 rail line, and so may need a specialist response.

The transformational projects in last year's plan, outlined below, resulted from our latest review of our CRMP and have all been complemented by innovation and technology. These projects continue to be our focus as part of this annual plan.



OUR PLAN 2023-2026



COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN PROJECTS

Risk-based crewing of a blended fleet of vehicles

Many of the incidents to which we respond are of low risk - for example, a relatively minor traffic collision or outdoor fire - so we continue to review how many firefighters we send to such incidents, what resources they use and to explore new types of vehicles.

Following a successful trial period, a new approach was rolled out to 11 fire stations from April 2022. Risk-based crewing (RBC) allows our staff to use data together with their knowledge and experience to select the right number of crew to send to low-risk incidents.

Our priority for 2023/24 is to trial a more sustainable concept vehicle designed to tackle low-risk incidents as part of our blended fleet, allowing the wider roll-out of RBC.

As well as allowing us to better match our resources to risk, RBC reduces disruption for our staff, keeps more of our appliances 'on the run' and frees-up time for vital training, prevention activity and protection interventions.



OUR PLAN 2023-2026



COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN PROJECTS

Automatic fire alarms (AFAs)

Many of the AFA activations to which we respond are false alarms, so we're continuing to look at how we gather more information at point of call to help us categorise and respond to them proportionately. We want to ensure we only respond to AFAs when necessary, so we're ready to respond to incidents that pose an immediate risk to life or property. Where we do respond to an AFA, we want to utilise the flexibilities offered by our blended fleet to send a smaller vehicle with fewer staff. This year we are focusing our attention on residential care homes, working with them to ensure we respond - but only when they need us.



Emerging risks

The number and severity of incidents we attend is influenced by climate change, the threat of terrorism and big infrastructure projects, such as construction of the HS2 rail line. We need to be ready to respond to all foreseeable risks, which means improving our skills and resources plus partnerships with other organisations. This year, we are continuing to monitor and review risks to identify new trends that may affect how we deliver our services and the skills our staff need to allow them to respond, as well as what support we can offer to our communities, so they are more resilient to these risks.



Reducing health inequalities

Our review of risk showed that there was an opportunity to enhance how we reduce risk in our communities. This included tackling, at an early stage, the health factors which can increase someone's chances of being harmed by fire and other emergencies at home.

This year we are committed to continuing this work through our work with partner organisations and a proactive approach to prevention.



Dynamic mobilising

In 2022 we increased our understanding of what affects someone's chances of surviving an emergency. We already know that getting to serious incidents in five minutes can make a massive difference to the outcome. We did more research, so we could better match our levels of response to different types of incidents. The focus for this year is to take our findings and use them to improve how we work, including through our approach to flexible crewing and a blended fleet of vehicles.

OUR PLAN 2023-2026



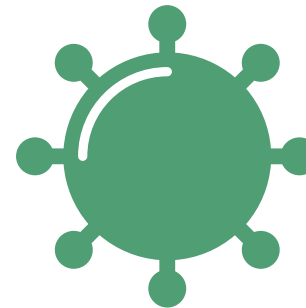
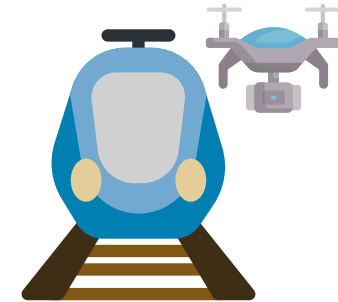
BEYOND 2023-2024

This year is the last year of our current three-year CRMP, so we will be carrying out consultation to inform and shape our next which will come into effect in 2024.

It will build on the priorities outlined above, and the projects that have already been developed, as well as new and emerging issues.

We have already identified a number of new areas which will likely form part of our next CMRP, including:

- environmental sustainability - how we will deliver against regional and national carbon reduction targets, to reduce harm to the environment and mitigate the inevitable impacts of climate change, such as flooding and heatwaves
- business continuity and resilience - COVID-19 and recent summer heatwaves are just two examples of why we want to make sure that our service is resilient to external shocks of all forms, in an increasingly complex risk environment. At the same time, we have an important role to play in improving the resilience of our communities, so they are better prepared to deal with crises
- emerging technologies - new transport technologies such as electric cars, driverless or autonomous vehicles, AI (Artificial Intelligence) systems and modern methods of construction all represent new risks which will need us to adapt our response
- cost of living - what impact does the increase in the cost of living have on our staff and the communities we serve? We know that deprivation increases risk from fire and other emergencies, and increases in the cost of heating and energy have implications for the safety of people's homes and businesses.



OUR PLAN 2023-2026



In an emergency dial **999** or **112**.
Dialling 999 or 112 is always free.

Even if you think someone else has already called for the
fire service, police or ambulance, do call 999 or 112
yourself to be sure.

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 other partners direct to your email inbox.

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



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