

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

6 March 2018

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

Report by Councillor John Edwards, Chair of the Authority

1. Revenue finances:

In a very similar way to local authorities core funding provided by the Government to West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA) has have been reduced by 50% (£38-million) since the cuts began in 2011.

A four year settlement for 2016/17 – 2019/20 was secured from government by the provision of a WMFRA efficiency plan. This produces the following front-loaded core funding reductions during this period:

- 2016/17 £3.278m
- 2017/18 £3.985m
- 2018/19 £1.691m
- 2019/20 £0.690m

These reductions are in addition to the £28-million cuts in core funding between 2011/12 and 2015/16.

In February WMFRA set a revenue budget for 2018/19 of £95.468-million supported by Council Tax income of £41.296 million and a Band D property precept increase of 2.99%. Even taking into account this increase, WMFRA still sets the lowest Council Tax level in England.

We have agreed the use of general balances of £1.5-million. This is to support the costs of service transformation which include working with our partners in Councils and the NHS on the delivery of services to reduce vulnerability.

WMFRA has also agreed a capital programme for 2018/19 of £13.322-million funded by earmarked reserves.

2. Capital spending

It is extraordinary that the government provides no capital funding and no access to any transformational funding particularly to the fire and rescue sector at a time when the same government is expecting transformation in the way in which the fire and rescue sector delivers its services.

WMFRA anticipated that following the constant attacks on revenue funding the government would do the same with capital spending and has for time been earmarking reserves to support our capital programme and the transformation of our service

Using earmarked reserves, Coventry and Aston fire stations are being replaced with modern, efficient, cost-effective and environmentally-friendly buildings. We are also using reserves to fund an essential vehicle replacement programme which includes front line fire appliances. Various other items of essential capital expenditure which we are supporting include extensive IT upgrades to equipment which is vital to our joint West Midlands/ Staffordshire fire control room which mobilises emergency responses for both services.

3. Delivering services to meet vulnerability

West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) is working with Coventry City Council, Dudley MBC and Wolverhampton City Council to deliver a response to their non-emergency calls from people who have fallen in their own homes. In Coventry, WMFS is working in collaboration with the NHS to provide a pilot home safe and well service for people who are being discharged from hospital.

These services are supporting our declared aim of keeping West Midlands safer, stronger and healthier. They bring us into direct contact with some of our frailest and most vulnerable citizens who are at high risk of being involved in a fire or other serious incident. By working with them upstream we can help to keep them safer into the future.

Although it's secondary to our key aim of supporting vulnerability, these are commissioned services which will provide projected income of £2-million over 4-years to help deal with our 4-year budgets cuts (mentioned in Section 1) and also help us maintain our service delivery model and our emergency response to life threatening incidents, which remains the fastest in the country at 4 minutes 45 seconds.

I'm pleased to report that WMFS and our representative bodies are now focussed on meaningful local discussions about taking this work forward.

4. Future governance of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

In September last year the 7 Local Authorities in the West Midlands and the Mayoral West Midlands Combined Authority, with the support of WMFRA, agreed that governance review and scheme for future governance should be developed and put to all 7 local authorities in the West Midlands for agreement before going out to public consultation at the start of 2018.

The scheme proposes a move in governance from the current arrangements to a model of WMCA/Mayoral governance.

The public consultation is in progress and the outcomes of it will be presented back to all 7 LAs before being submitted to the Secretary of State at the Home office for government consideration.

Should it be approved, this significant change in governance arrangements for West Midlands Fire Service is not expected to be made until April 2019.

4. Year to date performance

The performance indicators for WMFS for the current year to the end of January 2018 are:

Performance Indicator	Actual 2016/17	Target to end of Jan-2018	Actual to end of Jan-2018
The number of accidental fires in dwellings	1,591	1,327	1,352
The number of casualties from accidental fires in dwellings	65	52	43
The number of arson fires in dwellings	204	160	188
The number of accidental fires in non-domestic premises	447	354	347
The number of arson fires in non-domestic premises	191	132	169
The number of arson vehicle fires	914	755	749
The number of arson rubbish fires	1,919	1,654	1,770
The number of malicious false alarms calls received	879	N/A	459
The number of false alarm calls due to automatic fire alarms	5,660	4,675	4,532
Number led to safety from fires with brigade assistance	1,256	N/A	196
Number of rescues from fires	61	N/A	47
Number of RTCs attended	2,498	N/A	2,161
Number of extrications from RTCs	287	N/A	241

Accidental fires in dwellings are above below target but casualty numbers are below target. Arson fires in dwellings are above target.

Arson attacks in commercial properties are over target and on vehicles are slightly below.

During this 6-month period 243 people were rescued or led to safety from fires by firefighters. Fire crews attended 2,161 road traffic collisions and extricated 241 people from vehicles.

Despite unprecedented cuts in government funding West Midlands Fire Service continues to maintain its 5-minute target response time to category 1 incidents which threaten life or property.

Our current average response time in our high-risk areas continues to improve on the target and currently stands at 4 minutes: 45 seconds.

Cllr John Edwards
Chair, West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

March 2018