

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

23 March 2021

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

Report by Cllr John Edwards

1.

On the 18th March 2020 West Midlands Fire Service formally implemented business continuity arrangements in response to the COVID19 and in preparation of the announcement of a Major Incident across the West Midlands Conurbation.

As part of the Strategic Enabling Team (SET) structure the Business Continuity Management Team (BCMT) 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 Covid19
4. Establish a 'new' normal with a healthy workforce

The Service will begin its transition to recovery of usual business in line with the government road map communicated on the 22nd February 2021, maintaining its commitment to meeting business continuity objectives in a way which flexibly manages capacity, with a focus on 'establishing a new normal with a healthy workforce'.

2.

Delivery of core services

Prevention, Protection and Response services have continued to develop during the pandemic to support their most effective delivery of services to our communities in a safe, effective and assertive way.

Response services have continued to be delivered as usual, with additional measures in place to ensure staff are working in a safe environment.

Prevention and Protection services have adapted with the existence of Covid19 in the community to enable their delivery in a tailored way. These services continue to be targeted to those most vulnerable to fire and other related incidents. Pre-screening questionnaires are used in the event a premises has to be entered and the development of new methods such as a 'digital' fire safety audits and Safe and Well visits provide alternative approaches to enabling the delivery of core services at this current time.

All activities are risk assessed to ensure the safety of our communities and staff.

The Service continues to operate with established Covid19 guidance, responding effectively to changes within this.

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.

3.

Additional Activities

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.

Under a national agreement with trade unions, WMFS's approach of requesting volunteers from existing members of staff to undertake any new activities agreed and requested locally continues to work well.

The main areas of support provided by WMFS through additional activities agreed under the national agreement have been:

- The delivery of essential items and no contact letters
- The operation of Covid19 body movement
- Face mask fitting for NHS dentists
- Drop and collect of swab testing kits.

Community Vaccine Support: WMFS's partnership with St Joh's Ambulance (SJA) to provide Covid19 vaccines as part of the mass vaccination programme, has provided 260 volunteers from across the whole of the Service, who are now trained and will start to carry out volunteer shifts in early March.

In addition to the partnership with SJA, WMFS are receiving requests from NHS partnerships and GPs to support GP led vaccination programme and there is an expectation that this support will begin during March.

Lateral Flow Testing (LFT): LFT Hubs are open in Coventry, Wolverhampton, Dudley, Birmingham and Sandwell offering quick turnaround Covid19 tests for asymptomatic WMFS staff, their family members and extended support bubble. The Hubs are also open to West Midlands Police as part of a 'blue light' support arrangement.

Covid19 secure Inspections are being supported for supermarket premises in Sandwell.

In addition to these activities WMFS volunteers are supporting **Surge Testing** in support of Operational Eagle to identify spread of new variants.

The **pandemic multi agency response team (PMART)** was stood up again in late January, to support the movement of bodies between Birmingham Central Mortuary and temporary mortuary at Birmingham Airport. As the impact of Covid19 reduces the WMFS Team remain on standby to support any specific requests.

4.

Financial Summary

Two Separate Covid19 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. Covid19 related expenditure incurred up to the end of January 2021 amounted to circa £3.417M.

The Authority has applied for additional Covid19 funding. The outcome of this application is not yet known.

5.

Fire Authority governance arrangements

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority has continued to operate within the scope of the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) Regulations 2020.

Since the beginning of the pandemic the Authority has been digitally enabled by the Service to meet regular with weekly and then bi weekly Covid19 briefings. Since August 2020 these briefings with the Chief Fire Officer operate through the Authority's usual Policy Planning Forum (PPF), a Member engagement forum, on a monthly basis. This approach continues to be very successful and receives continued positive feedback from Authority Members. Authority meetings took place between October 2022 and February 2021 alongside the continuation of statutory meetings.

As the Authority begins to move into recovery it is expected to operate a fully functioning Authority and committee schedule from the June AGM 2021.

Where decisions are required and cannot be postponed, these continue to be considered and approved as appropriate under the Constitution's Standing Order, 17.1 'Urgent Matters', which provides the Chief Fire Officer with the delegation to make urgent decisions in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Authority.

This approach to Fire Authority arrangements is reviewed every 30 days between officers and Members to ensure appropriateness considering committee work programmes, areas requiring decision and the capacity of Officers to support their provision.

6.

Key Performance Indicators - Current year to the end of February

Performance Indicator	Actual 2019-20	Target to end of Feb-21	Actual to end of Feb-21
The number of accidental fires in dwellings	1,600	1,469	1,441
The number of injuries from accidental fires in dwellings	51	47	39
The number of deliberate fires in dwellings	206	193	167
The number of accidental fires in non-domestic premises	435	392	307
The number of deliberate fires in non-domestic premises	130	120	102
The number of deliberate vehicle fires	694	658	551
The number of deliberate rubbish fires	1,515	1,502	1,123
The number of malicious false alarms calls received	440	N/A	373
The number of false alarm calls due to automatic fire alarms	5,925	5,286	5,217
Number led to safety from fires with brigade assistance	251	N/A	240
Number of rescues from fires	148	N/A	47
Number of RTCs attended	2,758	N/A	2,014
Number of extrications from RTCs	251	N/A	150

Targets have been met in all areas.

During this period 287 people have been rescued or led to safety from fires.

Crews have attended 2,014 road traffic collisions and 150 people have been extricated from vehicles involved.

Cllr John Edwards

Lead Member WMFRA

March 2021