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**Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council  
Section 41 Report – October 2023  
West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority**

‘Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier’

Report by Councillor Rizwan Jalil

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## Membership of the Authority

The Members of the Authority for the Municipal Year 2023-24 are as follows:

Local Authority	Councillor(s)
Birmingham	Councillor Basharat Mahmood* (Labour) Councillor Gurdial Singh Atwal (Labour) Councillor Sybil Spence (Labour) Councillor David Barrie (Conservative)
Coventry	Councillor Catherine Miks* (Labour) <i>Vice-Chair</i> Councillor Gavin Lloyd# (Labour)
Dudley	Councillor Ian Kettle* (Conservative) Councillor Wayne Little (Conservative)
Sandwell	Councillor Rizwan Jalil* (Labour) Councillor Parbinder Kaur (Labour)
Solihull	Councillor Peter Hogarth MBE* (Conservative)
Walsall	Councillor Vera Waters* (Conservative) Councillor Matt Ward# (Labour)
Wolverhampton	Councillor Greg Brackenridge* (Labour) <i>Chair</i> Councillor Jas Dehar (labour)
Additional Member(s)	
Independent Member of the Audit and Risk Committee	Mr Mike Ager
Independent Member of Appointments, Standards and Appeals	Mr Ray Tomkinson (Standards Committee only)
Co-opted Members of the Authority	Professor Simon Brake Dave Brown
Police and Crime Commissioner: Represented by (if applicable):	Simon Foster Assistant PCC Wasim Ali Richard Castello – Head of Communications

\*Section 41 member

# Replaced Councillor Chris Bott (Labour) as of 18 September 2023

## Service Performance against Strategic Plan Q1 and Q2 2023/24 (up to end of August)

Please note these are the latest figures as of the end of August 2023, so they may be subject to change as data is further interrogated.

Response times to the most critical and high-risk incidents remain within target, and are well within target for all other categories of incident. The total number of accidental dwelling fires is significant under target, over performing expectations. Unfortunately, injuries from these fires is above target, although the overall number remains low.

The total number of Safe and Well points is below target, but the average assessment point score per safe and well visit remains high, which positively indicates our success in targeting prevention activity to the most vulnerable.

Deliberate fires in derelict buildings is well above target – this is an area of particular focus for the service and all our command areas are looking to work with partners to address the risks associated with these fires, including securing (e.g. boarding up) properties when they become derelict, and working with building owners to ensure they are safe from fire.

False alarms due to equipment – normally as a result of faults – are above the desired target for both domestic and non-domestic premises. While the service continues to work with repeat offenders and Alarm Receiving Centres to drive down these types of incident, we have also taken steps to reduce our overall attendance at false alarms to reduce costs and ensure our resources remain available for emergencies. We have already introduced a more proportionate level of response – a smaller vehicle crewed with one or two people - to hospitals and other managed forms of building such as university accommodation, unless there’s a confirmed fire. This has allowed us to keep resources available while ensuring we can support premises to meet their fire safety duties.

Indicator	Target	Performance
Risk Based Attendance Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Category 1 (high risk) – 5 minutes</li> <li>Category 2 – 7 minutes</li> <li>Category 3 – 10 minutes</li> <li>Category 4 – 20 minutes</li> </ul>	Category 1 – 04:52 Category 2 – 05:28 Category 3 – 04:59 Category 4 – 06:28
Accidental dwelling fires	676	591 (-12.6%) overperformance
Injuries from accidental fires in dwellings (requiring hospital treatment)	20	25 (+25.0%) underperformance
Safe & Well points achieved by the Brigade (visits to higher risk people bring a bigger point score)	130,000	101,246 (-22%) underperformance  Average assessment points 8.47 (out of 10)
Deliberate fires in dwellings	77	86 (+11.7%) performance on track

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Deliberate rubbish fires	671	645 (-3.9%) performance on track
Deliberate fires in derelict buildings	68	118 (+73.5%) underperformance
Accidental fires in non-domestic premises	159	134 (-15.7%) performance on track
False alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment – dwellings	2015	2348 (+16.5%) underperformance
False alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment – non-domestic	487	601 (+23.4%) underperformance

### Sandwell area performance and key statistics

In addition to the service level performance indicators above, specific statistics are available for the Sandwell area for Q1 and Q2 2023/24, up to and including August. As above, these are the latest figures, so they are subject to change as data is further interrogated.

Indicator	Performance	Notes
Accidental Dwelling Fires	71	16.5% below the target of 85
Deliberate Rubbish Fires	85	11.8% above the target of 76
False Alarms (Equipment) – Dwellings	259	39.2% above the target of 186
False Alarms (Equipment) – Non-domestic	57	32.6% above the target of 43
Safe and Wells completed	1744	68.6% of Safe and Wells were a result of partner referrals, significantly above the target of 50%
Average Assessment Points*	8.46	The average assessment points remain high

\* *Assessment points measure the vulnerability of the individual or family we undertake a SAW with – the more vulnerable someone is, the more points that visit will garner. WMFS is committed to targeting our interventions at the most vulnerable in our communities.*

## **WMFS activities during the last six months**

### **1. West Midlands Fire Service launches “We are WMFS” campaign**

In September 2023 WMFS launched a new communication campaign designed to highlight the wide range of roles within the service and the breadth of what we do with our communities. The campaign is designed to improve public understanding, drive more people to access our services and encourage more young people to consider the fire and rescue service for their future career. The campaign includes the launch of a new logo which you can see at the top of this report.

[Watch the “We are WMFS” launch video on our website.](#)

### **2. UKISAR deployment to Morocco**

Seven members of West Midlands Fire Service formed part in a UKISAR deployment to Morocco in September 2023 to support rescue efforts following a devastating earthquake. They formed part of a 60 strong deployment which responded following an offer of assistance to the Moroccan government from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

During the deployment, they conducted several missions. These included searches in remote areas across the Atlas Mountains, reporting back humanitarian needs assessments and conducting aerial searches. Volunteers also administered first aid to those in need.

The UK ISAR Incident Room was established at WMFS HQ and was staffed 24/7 by non-deployed UK ISAR team members.

[Read more about the deployment on the WMFS website.](#)

### **3. WMFS undertakes Community Risk Management Plan Consultation**

Between 3 July and 11 September, WMFS undertook a period of public consultation to help inform its development of the 2024-2027 Community Risk Management Plan. The consultation contained questions about prevention, protection, response, our people and sustainability, with responses helping shape plans for making the West Midlands safer, stronger and healthier. Under the National Fire and Rescue Framework, WMFS are required to consult on its Risk Management Plan at least every three years, or when there is a significant change to its assessment of risk in the West Midlands.

Over 5,500 members of the public, partners and members of staff provided their input, which will now be collated and shape the plans we put in place to manage risk across the West Midlands. Details of consultation responses will be shared with West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority on 23 October 2023.

### **4. Gender Pay Gap at Lowest Level**

West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) has recorded its lowest gender pay gap since records started in 2017. In March 2022, the difference for average earnings for men and women at WMFS stood at 6.8 per cent. Figures just released for March 2023 show a drop to 6.1 per cent.

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The publication of pay gap figures based on ethnicity is not a statutory requirement. However, WMFS has been analysing this data for a number of years. The difference between the average hourly rate of pay for white employees and colleagues from a black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) background has seen a positive move, from five per cent in 2022 to 4.7 per cent in 2023.

The service is also developing its pay gap data reporting, to better understand how someone's protected characteristics (gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, etc) might combine to impact what they are paid.

### **5. West Midlands Fire Service awarded 'gold' status in defence employer scheme**

West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) is proud to have been granted 'Gold' status in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS). Bronze, silver and gold awards go to employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to defence and the armed forces community, and align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant.

Wayne Brown, Chief Fire Officer, said: "We are very fortunate to count among our WMFS colleagues those who have either served for their country, or who volunteer as reservists. Their service, valour and experience make us stronger as a service, and we also acknowledge the support of their families. The Gold award also reflects the esteem in which we rightly hold all veterans."

### **6. Deputy and Assistant Chief Fire Officers appointed**

From the beginning of September 2023, [Deputy Chief Fire Officer Jo Bowcock](#) has joined WMFS from Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service on secondment. Jo joined the fire and rescue service with a degree in law and started her career as a firefighter in 2002, with Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, undertaking a broad range of roles including operations and resilience, operational policy and assurance, and corporate support as Group Manager.

In 2016, she took a secondment with London Fire Brigade as the strategic lead for business change and engagement for the National Operational Guidance Programme, advising all UK fire and rescue services in the implementation of national operational guidance. Jo was appointed as Assistant Chief Fire Officer for Corporate Services and People at Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service in 2019. She became DCFO in 2021, leading the Service Delivery Directorate where she was responsible for prevention, protection, response, resilience, trading standards and emergency planning.

The service is also pleased to have appointed two new Assistant Chief Fire Officers in July 2023. [Simon Barry and Richard Stanton](#) both started their careers at WMFS and have been with the Service for more than 20 years each. Both served in roles across the service having started out in Birmingham and Coventry respectively.

## National Fire and Rescue Service developments

### 7. Home Office analysis of fires attended by UK FRS

The Home Office has published the latest detailed statistics on fires attended by fire and rescue services across England, and fire-related fatalities and non-fatal casualties in those fires. This analysis covers the periods April 2022 to March 2023. Although the figures indicate a welcome and continued reduction in fire related fatalities, they also highlight the increase in overall fires and in particular outdoor fires as a result of last year's heatwave.

- there were 178,737 fires attended by FRSs in England, a 17% increase compared with the year ending March 2022 (152,639).
- there were 116,690 outdoor fires attended by FRSs in England, a 27% increase compared with the previous year, a 24% increase compared with five years ago and a 51% increase compared with 10 years ago.
- there were 259 fire-related fatalities, a 5.1% decrease compared with the previous year (273), a 23% decrease compared with five years ago, a 9.4% decrease compared with 10 years ago

[The full analysis is available on the Home Office Website.](#)

### 8. New Fire Safety laws come into force

Phase three of the Government's fire safety reform programme has come into force from 1 October 2023, with the introduction of Section 156 of the Building Safety Act 2022. These changes amends the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 in a number of ways:

- improving cooperation and coordination between Responsible Persons (RPs).
- increasing requirements in relation to the recording and sharing of fire safety information thus creating a continual record throughout a building's lifespan.
- making it easier for enforcement authorities (which includes Fire and Rescue Services) to take action against non-compliance.
- ensuring residents have access to comprehensive information about fire safety in their building.

[More details on the new regulations can be found on the Fire England website.](#)