



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

2018/19 Annual Report to Worcestershire County Council

Appointment of Chairman and Vice-Chairman

1. Councillor R J Phillips, from Herefordshire Council, was elected as Chairman of the Authority and Councillor P Tuthill, from Worcestershire County Council, was elected as Vice-Chairman.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)

2. Inspectors from HMICFRS carried out their in-depth review of the Service over Summer 2018, focusing on how effective and efficient it was and how well it looked after its people. Their report was published in December 2018 and highlighted areas of good practice, such as the delivery of services to local communities, but it also found areas where the Service could be better, such as using its limited resources more efficiently and improving how it supports and develops its workforce.
3. The Service has developed a plan to address the areas for improvement identified by the Inspectorate and regularly reports progress to the Fire Authority. The improvement plan is updated quarterly and can be found on the Publications area of the Service's website.

Strategic Alliance with Shropshire Fire Authority

4. On 12 September 2018, the Policy and Resources Committee (and subsequently the Full Fire Authority) approved a plan to create a Strategic Fire Alliance between Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Services. The plan was also approved by Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority at their meeting on 10 October 2018.
5. In endorsing the creation of the Alliance, both Fire Authorities directed Senior Officers from their respective Services to prepare a joint programme plan to achieve the aims of the Alliance.
6. The priority projects agreed were as follows:
 - a. Fire Control: scoping the future requirements for ensuring a resilient Command & Control function,
 - b. IRMP/CRMP: reviewing options for aligning integrated risk management planning processes, and
 - c. ICT: developing organisational arrangements for the provision of Information & Communications Technology functions.

Police and Crime Commissioner's Case for Governance of Fire and Rescue Service

7. On 29 July 2019, Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority (HWFA) learned that it had not succeeded in persuading the High Court that the former Home Secretary's original decision to approve the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC) business case (to take over the governance of the Fire and Rescue Services in Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Worcestershire) should be set aside. This was despite the judge recognising that the Home Secretary had used the incorrect legal definitions in respect to determining the 'efficiency, effectiveness and economy' of the business case.
8. The decision followed a judicial review process instigated by both HWFA and Shropshire & Wrekin Fire Authority following unanimous support and direction from the four constituent local authorities.
9. In light of this and having considered legal advice, the Fire Authorities believe there are grounds to challenge the Court's decision and have therefore applied for leave to appeal. They are also applying for a further judicial review in respect of the Home Secretary's refusal to reconsider the PCC's business case following the break-up of the West Mercia/Warwickshire Police Alliance.

Wyre Forest Hub

10. The build of the new Wyre Forest Blue Light Hub will be completed in November and is expected to be fully operational early in the new year. Our multi-agency project will bring our Wyre Forest fire and rescue crews together with West Mercia Police's Safer Neighbourhoods team and Harm Hub under the same roof. The Hub will be a focus for community safety delivering the best prevention, protection and response services available for the communities of the Wyre Forest.

Operational Activity

11. During the year, we attended 7,501 incidents, an increase of 570 over the previous year, but still 9 per cent lower than 10 years ago. About a third of the increase was because of an upsurge in grassland, woods and crop fires, mostly during the 2018 summer heatwave. We attended 25 more road traffic collisions than last year, but were called to fewer flooding and animal rescue incidents. False alarms still make up the majority of incidents we attend (45 per cent of all incidents). The Fire Authority continues to monitor this changing operational activity on a quarterly basis and regularly scrutinises the Service on its prevention plans and activities in this area.

Cllr R Phillips, Chairman and Cllr P Tuthill, Vice-Chairman
Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

FURTHER INFORMATION is available in the Fire Authority Annual Report 2019/20 on the Service's website at www.hwfire.org.uk/your-right-to-know/our-publications/