



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

2019/20 Annual Report to Worcestershire County Council

Appointment of Chairman and Vice-Chairman

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

Organisational Change and Employee Relations

2. In order to deliver significant efficiencies and achieve a sustainable budgetary position going forward, as well as avert a potential legal challenge from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) regarding the Service's innovative Day Crewing Plus (DCP) duty system (despite it being well-liked by local crews), the Fire Authority made some difficult decisions in 2019 and 2020 regarding frontline crewing arrangements. Unfortunately, this led initially to a trade dispute with the FBU which then required further work by all parties to resolve, but the final outcome has been substantial agreement for changes across the Service that has also managed to be delivered within the limitations of its Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). The process of reaching agreement has also strengthened local employee relations.

Response to Wide Area Flooding and Covid-19

3. Throughout 2020, the Service has been responding to two overlapping major incidents, firstly the wide area flooding that hit the two counties throughout January – March, followed swiftly by the coronavirus pandemic from March until the present day. As a key partner at the Local Resilience Forum (LRF), HWFRS led in many areas of the flood response at the beginning of 2020 – responding to nearly 2500 calls for assistance (over the period that included Storm Ciara, Storm Dennis and Storm Jorge), ranging from water rescues and property flooding to supporting vulnerable people isolated in their homes with food deliveries and welfare checks. This also involved individuals and teams from right across the Service and not exclusively frontline crews.
4. In respect to the pandemic, HWFRS has also been a strong supporter of partners in the LRF, such as Local Authorities and health providers, undertaking a range of activities such as PPE distribution and face-mask fit testing, as well as helping to plan to support patient transport services, if required. This has resulted in the Service using its skills and resources to good effect in areas of work not normally associated with the Fire and Rescue Service, but in priority areas that have benefitted both partner agencies and the local communities.

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

5. Following on from its 2018 inspection, the Service has been making good progress against its improvement plan, particular in the 'People' area, such as developing and adopting a reviewed set of core values, investment into the areas of equality, diversity and inclusion, as well as an overhaul of its selection and promotion process focussing on fairness together with attraction and retention of people from under-represented groups and backgrounds. At the time of writing this report, the anticipated 2020 HMICFRS follow-up inspection had been postponed until sometime in 2021, although a specific Covid-19 inspection of English FRS's will be undertaken during autumn / winter 2020.

Strategic Alliance with Shropshire Fire Authority

6. The Strategic Fire Alliance between Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Services continues to make progress in the four priority areas.
7. The priority projects are as follows:
 - a. Fire Control: scoping the future requirements for ensuring a resilient Command & Control function (taking into account the Grenfell Tower and Manchester Arena Inquiry recommendations),
 - b. Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP): aligning Community Risk Management Planning processes (to use within the 2021-2025 CRMP)
 - c. ICT: developing organisational arrangements for the provision of Information & Communications Technology functions.
 - d. Procurement: identifying areas of potential efficiencies and alignment in the procurement of goods and services, as well as procurement practice.

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

8. Following national political direction from the government, the role of Police & Crime Commissioners (PCC) has now come under formal review, with a view to consider its expansion. In addition, at a local level, the Policing Minister has requested the West Mercia PCC to review their business case for taking over governance of the two Fire & Rescue Services, effectively resulting in withdrawal of the original case as well as delaying the submission of any reviewed business case until after the findings of the wider PCC review (post-May 2021 elections).
9. This has allowed the two Fire Authorities to withdraw their application for a second judicial review (after the first review had failed on appeal), as it was based on the argument that the business case needed to be reviewed due to significant changes in the local circumstances.

New Station Build Programme

10. The transfer to the new Wyre Forest Blue Light Hub took place in February / March 2020, following a slight delay due to the organisational and operational demands placed up on the Service by the wide area flooding over that period. In addition, replacement plans continue to be developed and progressed for new stations at Redditch, Hereford and Broadway.

Operational Activity

11. During the year, we attended 7,901 incidents, an increase of circa 400 incidents over the previous year, but still 3 per cent lower than 10 years ago. This increase was due mainly to a 44% increase in Special Service calls (e.g. flooding) as a consequence of extreme weather events in October 2019 and February 2020. We attended 34 fewer house fires and 14 fewer road traffic collisions than last year, but were called to many more flooding incidents, together with a large increase in calls to assist other agencies, such as the Police and Ambulance Service.

12. False alarms still made up the majority of incidents we attended (44 per cent of all incidents), although these remained almost exclusively from either accidental activation of business fire alarm systems and domestic smoke alarms or people calling in a suspected incident in good faith. In contrast, we received only 57 malicious false alarm calls out of a total of 3451 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 2020/21 on the Service's website at www.hwfire.org.uk/your-right-to-know/our-publications/