



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

2020/21 Annual Report to Worcestershire County Council

Appointment of Chairman and Vice-Chairman

Councillor C B Taylor, from Worcestershire County Council, was elected as Chairman of the Authority and Councillor R Phillips, from Herefordshire Council, was elected as Vice-Chairman.

Fire Authority Changes

Following the elections to Worcestershire County Council there has been a significant change to the membership of the Authority, resulting in 10 new Members from Worcestershire County Council. To enable Members to fully understand the depth and breadth of the organisation a number of Member training sessions were delivered to underpin the three key strategies, Prevention, Protection and Response. Furthermore, changes to the Service's operational exercising programme are also delivering opportunities to expose Members to live operational activity, albeit in a controlled environment.

Appointment of Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Jonathon Pryce was appointed Chief Fire Officer on 1st April 2021, following the retirement of Nathan Travis. Guy Palmer was appointed Assistant Chief Fire Officer on 1st April 2021, following the promotion of Jonathon Pryce.

Organisational Change and Employee Relations

The Service has published its updated Community Risk Management Plan 2021-2025 (CRMP) after a comprehensive period of public consultation. To support this three new core Strategies have been created - Response, Protection and Prevention closely linked to mitigating risks highlighted in the CRMP. The new core strategies have been promoted across the workforce and are supported by key performance indicators reported on regularly.

Enabling plans sit beneath the core strategies, for example the Fire Authority has approved the Environment Sustainability Plan 2021-25 for publication.

To support organisational change the Service has prioritised recruitment drives for Wholetime and On-call Firefighters. Working collaboratively with partners remains a priority, for example the Service has recently welcomed cohorts of school children to take part in the Dying to Drive scheme.

Leadership development is critical for the management cohort, and during the past 18 months the Service has been working with Trans2 (a specialist leadership company) to deliver training programmes promoting self awareness and positive leadership skills.

Covid-19

At the height of 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. As the country moved through the various stages of unlocking we supported vaccination programmes with logistical support. The Service has maintained a keen eye on compliance within the workplace and managers are regularly reviewing arrangements within their areas to ensure we remain safe in terms of cross contamination, yet agile enough to still deliver the service the public have come to expect.

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

The Service has been working to close an improvement plan following an inspection in 2018. All outstanding actions relating to the 2018 HMICFRS inspection have now been closed.

The HMICFRS inspected the Service twice more recently. The first in October 2020 reviewing the Service's response to the COVID-19 pandemic; the second in April 2021, for a full inspection themed around the pillars of Efficiency, Effectiveness and People.

Their full report of findings and recommendations is due to be published in December 2021. In the interim the Service has unfortunately received a formal cause of concern in relation to its prevention activity. An action plan to show how the Service will discharge the concerns was provided to the inspectorate by 31 August 2021 and a large part of the concern has been discharged by the end of October 2021.

Whilst disappointing, the areas of note were already being addressed, and the Service is working through the action plan, expecting a revisit from the inspectorate later this year.

Strategic Alliance with Shropshire Fire Authority

The Strategic Fire Alliance between Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Services continues to make progress in the four priority areas which are as follows:-

1. Fire Control – 999 Mobilising Function: scoping the future requirements for ensuring a resilient Command & Control function (taking into account the Grenfell Tower and Manchester Arena Inquiry recommendations).
2. Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP): aligning Community Risk Management Planning processes (to use within the 2021-2025 CRMP).
3. ICT: developing organisational arrangements for the provision of Information & Communications Technology functions.
4. Procurement: identifying areas of potential efficiencies and alignment in the procurement of goods and services, as well as procurement practice.

5. Fire Investigation: driving compliance to support criminal investigations on behalf of both organisations is underway.

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

Following the judicial review challenges brought by Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority and Shropshire & Wrekin Fire Authority, the Home Office Minister wrote to the PCC in June 2020 indicating that if the PCC wished to continue with his bid to take over governance of the Fire and Rescue Services, it would be necessary for him to submit an updated business case sometime after the May 2021 PCC elections.

No further business case has been submitted at the moment.

In the meantime the government has reaffirmed its commitment to expanding the role of PCCs. A consultation paper on the future of Fire and Rescue Services is expected to be published this Autumn and it is expected this will include further proposals in relation to governance. We wait to see whether these will include proposals to mandate the transfer of governance of all relevant Fire and Rescue Services to the Police and Crime Commissioners where boundaries are coterminous. It is anticipated that any such change would require primary legislation.

Property Update

Following the dissolution of Place Partnership Limited, the Fire Authority entered into an agreement with the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia to deliver our property management functions. The new service became operational on 1st April 2021 and continues to transition and develop well.

The new Wyre Forest Fire Station has been operational for over 12 months, and was officially opened in September 2021.

Broadway has a one fire engine on-call station which has been recognised for some time as being in a very poor state of repair and lacking the facilities necessary for a modern fire station. The existing site is quite constrained but following abortive attempts to identify a suitable alternative location, the Fire Authority resolved to redevelop a new station on the existing site. A detailed planning application was submitted in May 2021 and this was approved by the local authority on 6th October 2021.

The replacement of Redditch Fire Station has been part of the Authority's approved capital programme for several years. We are working in collaboration with West Mercia Police who are also keen to relocate from their existing premises, to provide a joint facility building upon the concept of the Bromsgrove joint Fire/Police station. Architects have been appointed and are developing proposals in order to submit a planning application to the local authority.

The Service currently has strategic training facilities (STFs) at Wyre Forest, Evesham and Peterchurch. These provide 'hot fire house' training environments which are essential for the proper training of staff and maintenance of skills in a realistic environment. There has been a long-term strategy to provide a fourth STF in the north of Herefordshire so as to minimise travel time and improve training opportunities

across both counties for all locations, particularly for on-call crews in that area. A potential site has now been identified at Leominster Police Station, and proposals are being developed to submit a planning application to the local authority.

Hereford Fire Station was identified in 2011 with a number of other capital schemes, and is the only one which has not so far been delivered. The main reason for this has been the difficulty in finding a suitable site. However, this has not been for the want of trying and a number of alternative proposals have been investigated over the years. A proposal for redevelopment of the existing fire station site at St. Owen Street is now the preferred option, proposing a new four bay fire station with associated accommodation, improving access and egress from the site and enhancing car parking. The proposals also provide space for partners, office space for prevention and protection teams, and dedicated rooms for level one incident command training and assessments.

In February 2021 the Service published an Environmental Sustainability Plan (2021-2025) which sets out how we will continue to improve the ways in which we use our resources to ensure the least harm to our environment. Each year this grows in importance as our awareness is raised on the critical importance of changing our behaviours with regard to climate change and sustainability. Legislation and regulation reflect this priority and we are committed to ensuring we meet our requirements and where possible exceed expectations. Work continues in this area to develop plans and to date twenty-two fire stations have been surveyed and assessed concerning energy use, including carbon emissions.

Notable Incident

HWFRS responded to a major fire in a metal recycling business based in Park Street, Kidderminster. At the height of the blaze 28 appliances from across the two counties and neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services attended along with a number of specialist appliances and officers. The incident required a multiagency response and we worked with our partners within the Local Resilience Forum to limit the impact on the surrounding environment and community. The Chief Fire Officer was extremely pleased with the how the organisation responded and dealt with the incident, in particular the time taken to bring the incident under control and return the local area to near normality within 24 hours, thereby supporting local businesses and residents.

**Cllr C B Taylor, Chairman and Cllr R Phillips, Vice-Chairman
Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority**

FURTHER INFORMATION is available in the Fire Authority Annual Report 2021-22 on the Service's website at www.hwfire.org.uk/your-right-to-know/our-publications/