

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



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Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Overall, Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority performs adequately

Managing performance	2 out of 4
Use of resources	2 out of 4
Managing finances	2 out of 4
Governing the business	2 out of 4
Managing resources	2 out of 4

Description of scores:

1. An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements, Performs Poorly
2. An organisation that meets only minimum requirements, Performs Adequately
3. An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Well
4. An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Excellently

Summary

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority provides an adequate service. This year fires in the home fell following an increase the previous year. Injuries from fire have been falling over the past three years. Deaths from fire are low. It profiles risk which helps to predict where emergencies are likely to occur and the Authority responds quickly when they happen. The Authority has had good success in reducing arson and nuisance fires. Work in communities to prevent fires is having some impact but the Authority needs to do much more. The Authority targets prevention work towards those at highest risk in urban areas but prevention work is patchy in rural areas where people are isolated and fire crews take longer to reach them. The Authority has invested less in the past in such community safety work than almost every other fire authority in England. Hoax calls are falling but the Authority responds to too many false alarms which wastes money and distracts fire crews from real incidents.

The Fire and Rescue Authority has been slow to make the changes needed to provide a more efficient, modern fire service that balances emergency response with good prevention and protection work and gives taxpayers good value for money. The pace of change is picking up. Opportunities to make efficiency savings through changing working practices and using staff, stations and equipment more efficiently are being seized. Stronger leadership inside the service and from the County Council is driving forward an improvement plan that represents substantial and radical change in how the Authority delivers its services and spends its money. They know that they will need to work hard to gain the support of local people. They are showing that they are prepared to take and stick to the tough decisions that will be needed.

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority scores 2 out of 4 for managing performance. It meets its standards for emergency response. Deaths from fire are low. Fires in the home are falling. Fires in businesses also fell this year following a sharp increase last year. Working with other public services the Authority is reducing arson. It is carrying out some effective prevention work but the Authority does not plan well and good work can stop because of lack of funding. Achievements vary from year to year making it difficult to have confidence that good outcomes will be sustained. The Authority needs to be much clearer about what it is trying to achieve and focus more strongly on delivering better outcomes for communities particularly the most isolated. Home Fire Safety Checks involve fire fighters and other trained staff visiting people at home to alert them to the particular risks from fire they face, help them to form an escape plan and fit smoke alarms. The Authority focuses Home Fire Safety Checks on the most vulnerable people such as older people. It needs to carry out more checks especially in the rural areas where people do not have the fire safety information that they need.

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority scores 2 out of 4 for how it uses its resources to deliver value for money. This is because financial planning and management is sound in the County Council. Councillors also meet regularly to check performance, but the Fire and Rescue Authority is not assessing value for money performance on a regular basis. The Fire and Rescue Authority has improved the way it buys equipment to save money. However it is not making best use of the resources it has to achieve good value for money for taxpayers. It has been slow to look at how it uses its staff, assets and money to be more cost effective. Health and safety is a top priority. Injuries are at low levels and reducing. A recent independent health and safety assessment by ROSPA found high standards. Firefighter training is good. The Authority is developing the skills of its managers but does not have good plans to make sure that it has the skills that it needs now and for the future. The Authority is slowly improving the numbers of women firefighters and staff from minority ethnic communities. It relies heavily on firefighters working the Retained Duty System (RDS) especially in the rural areas. The Authority does not have a reliable or flexible enough approach to recruiting, training and keeping these staff.

This year Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service had a peer review of its Operational Assessment (OpA) self-assessment by accredited peers from the fire sector. The findings of this evidence-based review are used in this organisational assessment.

About Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority

The fire and rescue service is a department of Warwickshire County Council which acts as the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority. The county of Warwickshire covers around 197,533 hectares and has a population of just under 527,000. The major towns are Nuneaton, Stratford, Leamington, Warwick and Rugby. There are large sparsely populated rural areas. The proportion of older people is above regional and national averages and increasing. The proportion of young people is reducing. The population is largely of white British origin. The largest minority ethnic group is people of Indian heritage. Unemployment is low and earning levels relatively high

although there are pockets of deprivation in areas such as Rugby and Nuneaton. The health of people in Warwickshire is better than the England average. In recent years flooding has been an issue in areas such as Stratford, Leamington and Shipton on Stour.

Organisational assessment

Fires are reducing in Warwickshire. Injuries from fire have been falling over the past three years. The Authority is working well with other public services to reduce arson especially fires in abandoned cars. Working with young people it has reduced nuisance fires in Nuneaton and Bedworth. The Authority meets its target for getting to emergencies on most occasions. However, lack of availability of fire fighters on the Retained Duty System is a major issue with sometimes only half of these fire crews available during weekdays. Despite this the Authority manages to maintain emergency cover. Overall it needs to improve the way it manages its retained duty staff and review how it provides cover in their areas.

The government, in its national framework, for fire and rescue services expects fire authorities to achieve a good balance between emergency response, prevention and protection work. Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority does not achieve a good balance - it responds quickly to emergencies but does not do enough to prevent them or to protect vulnerable people and communities. Investment in preventing fires and other emergencies has grown by only 10 per cent in the past five years compared to a national growth rate of around 50 per cent. The Authority carries out a low number of Home Fire Safety checks. This year half of the homes in Warwickshire that had a fire had not had a Home Fire Safety Check and the Authority did not achieve this year's target for people who escape unharmed from a fire in their home - only 66 per cent of people escaped unharmed against its target of 98 per cent. It does target its efforts towards some vulnerable residents for example working with Age Concern to reach older people. It does not carry out enough Home Fire Safety checks in rural communities where people are vulnerable because they are isolated and the fire service takes longer to reach them.

The Authority knows it needs to increase the number of Home Fire Safety Checks. Last year it used temporary staff to reduce the backlog of requests for Home Fire Safety Checks in rural areas. This year it aims to deliver a twofold increase across the county. However it does not have a clear plan or guidance for staff for how it will achieve this which makes it unlikely that it will succeed.

Firefighter safety is a priority for the Authority. Workplace injuries are at low levels and reducing. Fire fighters are generally well trained although those working the Retained Duty System do not have enough opportunities to practise their skills. Sickness levels have fluctuated in recent years. In 2008/09 sickness levels were around 8 days per firefighter. The Authority needs to improve how it records and reports sickness levels so that it has accurate information on which to base its decisions.

The Fire and Rescue Authority responds to too many false alarms which wastes money and distracts fire crews from attendance at real incidents. It has worked in schools and through challenging suspect callers to reduce hoax

calls but still attends too many. The number of false alarms from automatic fire detection equipment is too high and the Authority needs to do more work with local businesses to reduce them. The Authority is only achieving its target of answering emergency calls in 60 seconds on 50 per cent of occasions.

The Authority is well placed to prepare for and respond to major emergencies such as flooding and terrorist threats through the way it works with other organisations. The Fire and Rescue Authority is improving the safety of some vulnerable residents. It provides increased safety protection measures for people with hearing impairment who are involved with the social care services. It has built relations with gypsy and traveller communities gaining their confidence so that it can deliver fire safety messages. The Authority works quite well with other public services to improve local neighbourhoods and reduce anti-social behaviour. It is working with others to reduce road traffic incidents but does not have clear aims for what it is trying to achieve.

The Authority does not routinely measure the impact and outcomes of projects in the community. This means that it cannot always be sure that it is targeting its resources in the right place or that it knows what works best. For example, it has been providing fire safety education programmes in schools for many years. Teachers value the work but the Authority does not evaluate the impact on pupils. Good local projects end because of lack of funding or lack of commitment to roll them out across the county. Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority understands where it needs to improve. It has a robust improvement plan based on big changes to the way it uses its staff and its fire stations. This has the potential to deliver much greater value for money by driving efficiency savings alongside improving the service - especially in prevention work. To achieve this, the Authority will need to talk with its communities so that local people understand the value of its plans and be prepared to take and stick to tough decisions. It is now doing this through a formally adopted 12 week consultation process which is designed to talk with communities about the improvements it proposes to make. Recent discussions with senior officers and councillors clearly indicates that the consultation is progressing, there are constructive discussions with staff and representative bodies and the Authority is listening and responding well to comments made. There is a clear intention to use the resources of the core services of the Council to support the implementation, for example, to oversee the project management of final proposals once agreed.

CAA looks at how well local public services, working together, are meeting the needs of the people they serve. It's a joint assessment made by a group of independent watchdogs about the performance of local public services, and how likely they are to meet local priorities. From 9 December you will find the results of Comprehensive Area Assessment on the Oneplace website - <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk/>

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