

Minutes of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

11th April, 2005 at 11.00 a.m.
at the Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham

Present: Councillor Hinton (Chair);
Councillor Hogarth (Vice-Chair);
Councillors, Birbeck, Bowen, G. Davies, S. Davis,
Eustace, Foster, Haque, Howard, Idrees, Jackson,
Jevon, Lawrence, Matchet, Mulhall, Pitt, Rogers, Ross,
Ryder, Singh, Underhill and Wallace.

Apologies: Councillors Perry and Ward.

12/05 Membership of the Authority

The Clerk reported that he had been notified by Birmingham City Council that two of their Members who currently served on the Fire Authority, Councillors Afzal and Kazi, were disqualified from serving as Councillors from 4th April, 2005. Their membership of the Fire Authority had therefore also ceased with effect from that date.

13/05 Petition

The Authority received a petition of 600 signatures opposing the Authority's proposals to reduce the number of fire engines operating at night in the Brierley Hill and Dudley area.

14/05 Chair's Announcements

Faith and Diversity Booklet

The Chair reported that a Faith and Diversity booklet had been produced as part of the Authority's strategy to promote equality of service to all parts of the community. In response to questions from Members, it was reported that the total cost of the project was £2,800.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment Preparation

The Chair thanked Members who had attended a helpful training

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session on 6th April, 2005. He reminded Members that a further briefing session was to be held immediately after this meeting.

Vote of thanks

The Chair reminded Members that this was the last meeting of the Authority before the Annual Meeting to be held on 27th June, 2005. He thanked Members for their contributions and support over the past year.

Members asked whether the meetings of the Policy Planning Forum scheduled for 23rd May and 13th June would take place.

Confirmation was given that these meetings would proceed, and that any known prospective appointees to the Fire Authority would be invited to attend as observers.

15/05 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 14th February, 2005, be confirmed as a correct record.

16/05 **Civil Contingencies Act, 2004 – Change of name of Fire Authority**

The Authority was informed that Paragraph 10 of Schedule 2 of the Civil Contingencies Act, 2004 had now come into force. The effect of this provision was that from 1st April, 2005 metropolitan county fire and civil defence authorities would be known as metropolitan county fire and rescue authorities.

The West Midlands Fire and Civil Defence Authority had at its meeting on 26th July, 2004 approved a list of powers delegated to the Chief Fire Officer and Statutory Officers. The Authority was requested to confirm those delegations in its new identity as Fire and Rescue Authority. The list of delegations was circulated, with some amendments to reflect new legislation that had come into force since July 2004.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the West Midlands Fire and Civil Defence Authority hereafter be known as the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority;
- (2) that the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

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delegates to its Chief Fire Officer and Statutory Officers the powers set out in the attached Appendix.

17/05 Business Plan Section of the Best Value Performance Plan and Business Plan 2005/06

The Authority considered a report seeking approval to changes to the Business Plan Section of the Best Value Performance Plan and Business Plan 2005/06 proposed following a review of the Business Plan by the Corporate Board. The changes included revision of the stated Business Plan objectives, review of departmental objectives, and a list of items identified for inclusion in the 10 year scan.

Resolved that the proposed amendments to the Authority's Business Plan within the combined Business and Best Value Performance Plan, as set out in the Appendices to the report, be approved.

18/05 Performance Management Framework

The Authority considered a report setting out a suite of Brigade Standing Orders which had been launched on 1st April, 2005, to codify the Authority's Performance Management Framework. The introduction of standing orders setting out the framework had been recommended by a review commenced in August 2003 to identify areas for improvement in this area.

Resolved that the suite of Standing Orders relating to the Performance Management Framework be noted.

19/05 Maintenance Contract – Command and Control System

The Authority was informed that, after consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, urgent action had been taken in February 2005 to discontinue the existing maintenance contract with Cap Gemini for maintenance of the Brigade's existing Command and Control system with effect from 31st March, 2005, and to approve the establishment of two posts within the ICT Communications Team to ensure the continued maintenance of the system until the Regional Control Centres become operational.

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20/05 **Personal Insurance for Firefighters**

The Authority was informed that, after consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, urgent action was taken in March 2005 to send a response to the Fire Brigades National Employers to their Circular EMP/6/05, which invited comments from fire authorities on the issue of personal insurance for firefighters who respond to terrorist incidents. A response had been requested by 2nd March, 2005.

21/05 **Minutes of the Executive Committee**

The minutes of the meetings held on 28th February, 21st March and 4th April, 2005 were received.

22/05 **Notes of the Policy Planning Forum**

The notes of the meetings held on 28th February and 21st March, 2005, were received.

23/05 **Minutes of the Appeals Committee**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th March, 2005 were received.

24/05 **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 relating to:

Minute No. 25/05 – negotiations or consultation on labour relations matters and disclosure would be likely to prejudice those negotiations;

Minute No. 26/05 – terms proposed for the disposal/acquisition of property or the supply of goods and services and disclosure would be likely to prejudice the Authority.

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25/05 **New Duty System and Shift Pattern for Station-based Operational Personnel**

The Authority considered a report setting out a new duty system and shift pattern designed to meet the needs of its Integrated Risk Management Plan for 2005/06.

Formal consultation with the workforce and representative bodies had been ongoing since 4th January, 2005 and the proposed duty system and shift pattern addressed some of the concerns expressed by personnel during the consultation process.

It was hoped to finalise negotiations with the Fire Brigade's Union by 18th April, 2005. In the event that no agreement was reached, it was proposed to refer the matter to the independently-chaired Technical Advisory Panel established in accordance with the terms of the recent National Agreement on Fire Service Pay and Conditions. Any referral to the Panel would need to be made by the end of April, 2005 to achieve the intended start date of 9th September, 2005 for the new duty system and shift pattern.

The estimated savings from the new duty system and shift pattern arrangements would be approximately £1.58m. These anticipated savings had been taken into account in fixing the Authority's budget for 2005/06.

Members referred to the hard work that had gone into drawing up the proposals and the consultation with the workforce, and expressed their appreciation to the officers concerned.

Resolved:

- (1) that the new duty system and shift pattern for station-based operational personnel drawn up following preliminary consultation with the workforce be noted;
- (2) that in the event of its rejection by the Fire Brigade's Union following the completion of the formal consultation process on 18th April 2005, the referral of this proposed duty system and shift pattern to the National Joint Council's Technical Advisory Panel be approved.

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26/05 **Mobile Data Software Upgrade**

The Authority considered a report that had been referred to it by the Executive Committee [Minute No. 29/05 of the Executive Committee refers].

The report sought approval for the procurement of a new software package to enhance the mobile data facilities on all operational vehicles. The current software was ten years old, based on an outdated and insecure operating system, and was costly to update. The proposed upgrade would significantly enhance the operation of the mobile data system by providing additional operational risk and support information to assist at operational incidents, thus improving the management of health and safety of service personnel and the public and underpinning the Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan.

In the long term, responsibility for Mobile Data software would be taken over by the Regional Control Rooms. The projected timescale for the opening of the Regional Control Room for the West Midlands region was late 2008 at the earliest. This Authority's software therefore needed to be resilient for a further period of at least three to four years. It had been established that if software was to be replaced as part of the move to a Regional Control Room, the costs would be borne by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Two companies were able to supply a software system compatible with the Brigade's existing infrastructure. The costs were similar, but following user tests, one system had emerged as the preferred option. It was proposed to use the Office of Government Commerce G/Cat route for the procurement of ICT goods and services, and the Authority's contract standing orders permitted an exception from obtaining competitive tenders in these circumstances.

The cost of providing and installing the software in all the existing fleet of appliances was £152,000. Software support and maintenance would cost £28,000 per annum, and would be offset by the cancellation of the existing maintenance contract. These costs could be met from the existing ICT budget.

Resolved:

- (1) that the proposed procurement of Commercial off the Shelf Software from IMASS Ltd to provide enhanced mobile data facilities on all operational vehicles, at a cost of £152,000,

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utilising the Office of Government Commerce G-Cat procurement route, be approved;

- (2) that an exception from obtaining competitive tenders in accordance with paragraph 3.14 (f) of the Authority's Contract Standing Orders be approved.

(Meeting ended at 11.50 a.m.)

Contact Officer: Georgina Wythes
Democratic Services Unit
0121-569 3791