

<p>Notes of the Policy Planning Forum</p>
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14th October, 2013 at 10.00 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham

- Present:** **Members of the Authority**
Councillor Edwards (Chair);
Councillor Idrees (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Aston, Singh Atwal, Auluck, Chambers,
Clinton, Collingswood, Davis, Douglas-Maul,
Eustace, Foster, Hogarth, O'Reilly, Quinnen, Sealey,
Shackleton, Singh, Spence, Tranter, Walsh, Yardley
and Young;
Mr Ager.
- Officers:** **West Midlands Fire Service**
Chief Fire Officer (V Randeniya);
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Loach);
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (P Hales);
Director Human Resources (D Johnson);
M Howard-Russell, P Mika, P Shergill, J Simmonds and
S Warnes.
- Clerk and Monitoring Officer**
N Sharma
S Suthi-Nagra.
- Treasurer**
Stuart Kellas.
- Apologies:** Councillors Mottram and Wright.

19/13

Chair's and Chief Fire Officer's Announcements

The Chair made a number of announcements as follows:-

- A copy of a letter drafted by the Chair for all Members of Parliament within the West Midlands had been circulated to all section 41 members. The letter made reference to:
 - the impact to the Fire Service of the financial cuts which equated to 26%. A further 10% cut was anticipated in 2015/16;
 - in Years 1 and 2, there would be a double hit in financial cuts and a flatline cut was needed;

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- flexibility in Council Tax was needed to enable recruitment of front line staff.

Members were encouraged to lobby their MPs with a view to raising these issues with Government;

- Chris Williams, Shadow Fire Minister and supporter of the fire sector, had visited the brigade on 2nd October 2013. He had, however, since lost his seat Shadow Fire Minister following a reshuffle. Lyn Brown had now taken over this position and the Chair would be writing to her, on behalf of the Authority inviting her to visit the West Midlands.

The Chief Fire Officer made a number of announcements as follows:-

- further firefighter strike action was planned for Saturday 19th October 2013 from 6.30 pm until 11.30 pm. The strike action was a response to the firefighter pension regulation which would become law next year. It was hoped that the dispute between firefighters and the Government would be resolved as soon as possible;
- Firefighter Tommy Sedgwick had been seriously injured following a fall down a lift shaft whilst tackling a blaze in Handsworth. Both the Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer had visited Firefighter Sedgwick in hospital. The Health and Safety Executive were currently investigating the cause of the accident;
- the Chief Fire Officer had attended the Breathing Apparatus Challenge which took place at the Fire Service College on Saturday 12th October, 2013. A number of teams made up of firefighters from across the United Kingdom had competed to be the best Breathing Apparatus team at this year's event which promoted best practice and fire fighter safety across a range of areas. This year's winner was Sheldon Community Fire Station red watch, part of the West Midlands Fire Service, who had also won last year. The Chief Fire Officer recognised that crew continued to strive for excellence and felt that a lot of good work and capability was being demonstrated within the West Midlands.

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20/13 Staffing Strategy Service Delivery

Area Commander Sarah Warnes gave a presentation on the Staffing Strategy which included details of current staffing figures, resource configuration and staffing in 2015 once the 10% budget reductions within the Fire Service was implemented.

Whilst 55 new entrants had recently been recruited to the Service, in order to maintain optimal staffing levels and resource configuration, it was proposed that in 2014/15, a further 46 members of staff would need to be employed.

Dialogue with representative bodies was ongoing and the staffing options within the proposed Staffing Strategy would need to be considered alongside future budgetary requirements.

21/13 Recruitment Process

The Director of Resources gave a presentation on the recent process undertaken to recruit 55 new entrants into the Fire Service following a recruitment freeze since 2009/10.

The National Framework had recently removed the requirement for a mandatory firefighter selection test. This had enabled the Service to develop an effective process for recruiting which incorporated behaviour and personal accountability.

A number of positive actions initiatives had been undertaken aimed to select the highest performers. This included targeting areas of under representation within the Service, including women, black, minority ethnic groups and young people.

The selection process had seen 9516 potential candidates registering an interest online with 7539 commencing the application process and 5134 completing all sections.

600 people had been invited to undertake a written test which was relevant to the job, for example, working with numbers and problem solving.

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The next stage had involved a number of practical tests where 190 candidates had been invited to participate.

The grip test in particular had revealed equality issues where a number of women were able to perform the task only when they removed their gloves. It was felt that the gloves that were being supplied for the test were designed for men and were therefore ill-fitting on women.

For the interview stage, 96 candidates had been shortlisted and their personal attributes and qualities were assessed including their understanding of The Plan and its key priorities.

Following pre-employment checks, which included medical examinations, a fitness assessment, references and Criminal Record Bureau checks, 55 applicants were appointed of which 11% were women and 15% from the black, minority, ethnic groups.

The new entrants, whose ages ranged from 18 to mid 40's, were now on an eight week training course.

The Scrutiny Committee would be undertaking a detailed review of each stage of the recruitment process to identify any improvements that could be made to the process for future recruitment exercises.

Members raised concern that during the different stages of the recruitment process, the black, minority, ethnic group representation had been quite high, however, this had fallen to just 6% representation during the last stage. The Director Human Resources reported that the reason for the reduction would form part of the Scrutiny Committee's review.

The Chair, on behalf of members, thanked the Team for the positive action steps undertaken during the recruitment process.

In relation to a query on the distribution of papers that formed part of the Policy Planning Forum presentations, it was agreed that hard copies of the presentations would be made available for members on the morning of the Policy Planning Forum.

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22/13 Equality Impact Assessment

Members received a presentation by the Equality and Diversity Manager, Preith Shergill, on equality analysis in decision making using equality impact assessments.

The Equality Act 2010 had placed a requirement on all public sector organisations to have due regard to equality analysis when making decisions.

The Authority had a legal requirement to publish the outcomes of any equality impact assessments to demonstrate that they had taken equality issues into account when planning and making decisions. Failure to do so could lead to enforcement action by the Equality and Human Rights Commission or a Judicial Review for claims of unfair dismissal.

Details were given on the process applied when conducting an equality impact assessment. The Authority was targeting managers to consider how their decision-making could affect the community, in particular, those with protected characteristics. Any equality impact assessments produced as part of the decision making process would be considered by the Equality and Diversity Team.

23/13 Making Every Contact Count (MECC)

The Director Operations gave a presentation on Making Every Contact Count; a NHS initiative seeking to change the culture across organisations to promote prevention, healthier lifestyle choices, making people feel safer and increasing confidence and motivation.

Making Every Contact Count was aimed at everyone who came into contact with members of the public and for those who had the opportunity to provide advice to improve health and wellbeing.

Whilst the Service currently focused on prevention, adopting this initiative would help to tackle the wider health and wellbeing issues.

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All frontline staff, particularly those undertaking home assessments, were being trained to meet the needs of the individual by raising healthy lifestyle issues, giving appropriate advice and signposting individuals to further advice or support.

Members were encouraged to promote the work of the Fire Service particularly in relation to the prevention agenda, as part of their respective roles on various partnerships forums and groups.

(Meeting ended at 12.30 pm)

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