

<p>Notes of the Policy Planning Forum</p>
--

**9th December, 2013 at 10.30 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

Present: **Members of the Authority**
Councillor Edwards (Chair);
Councillor Idrees (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Aston, Singh Atwal, Chambers,
Collingswood, Davis, Douglas-Maul, Finnegan,
Hogarth, Mottram, O'Reilly, Quinnen, Shackleton,
Singh, Spence, Tranter, Walsh and Young;
Mr Ager.

Officers: **West Midlands Fire Service**
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach);
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales);
Director Human Resources (D Johnson);
Director Operations (G Taylor)
Director Resources (M Griffiths);
N Spencer.

Clerk and Monitoring Officer
N Sharma
R Jones.

Treasurer
Stuart Kellas.

Apologies: Councillors Auluck, Clinton, Eustace, Foster, and Wright.

28/13

Chair's and Chief Fire Officer's Announcements

The Chair made a number of announcements as follows:-

- Further to Note No. 26/13, the tablets for the use of Section 41 members were now available;
- He and the Chief Fire Officer had met with the Minister for Communities and Local Government, Brandon Lewis, and other officers/policy advisors last week. A briefing note of the six key points it was hoped would be discussed at the meeting would be circulated to all members, but in fact there had only been time to consider three main points. The Minister was to visit the West Midlands in the New Year.

Policy Planning Forum 9th December, 2013

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

- Further firefighter strike action was planned for Friday 13th and Saturday 14th December, 2013;
- He recapped on the Our Story event, announced at the last Forum, whereby all Fire Authorities in the country had been invited to attend to share in how the West Midlands Service had moved forward in what services it provided to the community and to evaluate how it was performing. This would allow our peers to critique our service provision. The Event told the West Midlands story particularly through peer review and challenge and how we were influencing and being influenced. Feedback would assist the Service in its Comprehensive Spending Review;
- He and the Chair had met with Lyn Brown MP, Shadow Minister for Communities and Local Government;
- A paper had been published by Tobias Ellwood MP on the future provision of blue light services, which proposed the merger of fire and ambulance services.

29/13

Response Model Feedback from Our Story

The Chief Fire Officer, Phil Loach, gave a presentation on the Fire Service's response model feedback from the Our Story event which had been held on 7th November, 2013 (Note 27/13 refers).

Within The Plan our intentions to "Making West Midlands Safer" covered:-

- Response, prevention and protection
"Our priorities, outcomes and strategic objectives"
- Risk-based attendance standards
"We remain committed to the highest standards of emergency incident cover"
- Risk-based prevention activities
"Designed to provide maximum impact for the investment made"

The Authority had 38 fire stations, 1322 firefighters, 19 Brigade Response Vehicles (BRV) and 41 Pump Rescue Ladder vehicles (PRL).

Policy Planning Forum

9th December, 2013

These resources allowed the Service to maintain prevention, protection and response services and a risk-based five minute attendance rate, although it was acknowledged that not all calls would be responded to within that time. Firefighters spent only between 6-10% of their time fighting fires; the remainder was spent on prevention activities, training or fulfilling duties contained within the Prevention document.

The Our Story event was well attended and members felt that it had been very challenging and very robust. Information received from other Fire Authorities would be corroborated.

The Chair asked how the Authority's model of service delivery would unravel if it decided to follow the Minister's request and used retained firefighters. It was reported that a retained model would allow five minutes for staff to get to the fire vehicle and that a response time would then be added onto that.

Members thought that the response time to an incident was critical and asked whether there was any difference in the response times between BRVs and PRLs. It was reported that not all Fire and Rescue Services agreed with our response time. BRVs were on average 15-20% faster than PRLs but which vehicle was sent depended upon the type of incident and that obviously BRVs might not be capable of dealing with certain situations.

In response to members' enquiries concerning the proposals for the use of retained firefighters the following responses were made:-

- Training would be for two to four hours per week as compared to the ten to fourteen hours for current firefighters;
- Employers would have to release people during the day and staff would rely on paging systems for evening/night incidents;
- A paper illustrating why an on call system would not work could not be provided as there was no rationale for on call firefighters; not whilst trying to maintain a five minute response rate;
- We were validating the proposals with other services and would update members in due course;
- A presentation would be made to a future Policy Planning Forum on a retained versus a whole time service;

Policy Planning Forum
9th December, 2013

Members felt that the use of retained firefighters in an area like the West Midlands with such a density of population and buildings was ridiculous, although it might work in some rural areas. It was felt that a report making the case for full time firefighters was needed for members to provide them with the details to try and influence the Minister and government that the use of retained firefighters in the area was ill-advised.

The Chief Fire Officer thanked members for their support and asked them to raise awareness of the proposals within their authorities and with their local MPs.

30/13

Dynamic Mobilising/Seconds Do Count

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Phil Hales, gave a presentation on how calls to incidents were managed by the Service under the categories of Receipt, Reaction and Travel. It was highlighted that persons receiving the call were call managers and that the second stage of the response cycle, referred to as Dynamic Mobilising, underpinned The Plan.

The actions of Dynamic Mobilising were:-

- Information
- Location of call
- Information from caller
- Number of calls to incident
- WMFS risk information
- Previous calls to address
- Location of WMFS resources

It was emphasised that the above was not a tick list to be worked through but that all seven actions were performed in parallel and happened simultaneously.

Dynamic Mobilising was a decision made based on risk. The information provided and the professional judgement made determined the level and type of response to the incident.

Policy Planning Forum

9th December, 2013

The Future:

- Developing people skills to support professional judgement
- Technology to enhance information
- Smart phones
- CCTV
- Developments in mobilising systems (pre alert)
- Shared Fire Control with Staffordshire
- Working with London and the North West

It was anticipated that when the Fire Control Centre was operational it would handle 40% of national calls.

Members were informed that if a Service had multiple calls at any particular time these could be diverted to other Services if necessary. The call manager would make this decision if appropriate.

31/13

Seconds Do Count

At the request of the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 4th November, 2013, members received a presentation from the Director Operations, Gary Taylor, on “Improving Our Response” – Do Seconds Count? The Committee had asked that details of the Response Time Project be reported to the Forum in order for the rationale of maintaining minimum response times to be understood.

Members were informed of the five categories of incident risk:

- 1 (High Risk)** that present the most significant risk to life, namely dwelling fires, other building fires, RTCs and ‘Life Risk’ SSCs, such as water rescue.
First Appliance Attendance Standard – 5 minutes
- 2 (Medium Risk)** where there was a potential risk (either through incident severity or the type of property affected) but there is a reduced likelihood of this risk being realized e.g. Flooding or AFA (Life Risk)’
First Appliance Attendance Standard – 7 minutes

Policy Planning Forum
9th December, 2013

- 3 (Low Risk)** where there is a significantly reduced risk to life e.g. Low risk SSC and AFA (Non Life Risk)
First Appliance Attendance Standard – 10 minutes
- 4** that are secondary fires and where there is a very low risk to life e.g. fires in the open, in waste materials or grass fires
First Appliance Attendance Standard – 20 minutes
- 5** False alarm calls – called in good faith, but turned out to be no incident (Not AFAs)

They were also made aware of the academic model of a fire which showed the time line of an incident: from notification to extinguishment and the progression of the fire and its relation to structural stability and civilian survivability. This placed civilian survivability at 10 minutes, which was approximately half way through the fire and when a building's structure was beginning to deteriorate at a faster rate.

It was noted that minutes were vital in responding to road traffic collisions and that the WMFS had the highest risk profile in the UK.

Each firefighter was expected to be as good as they could be and examples of motivational videos used were viewed.

The Service had set itself a one minute challenge in which to have the bells ringing on the way to an incident; this was 24 seconds less than the current standard.

Staff led improvements:

- Satellite navigation systems – to find the fastest way to an incident;
- Risk mapping – e.g. the best approach to an incident;
- Start getting ready/dressed before arriving at an incident.

Members noted that if a fire progressed for ten minutes this usually coincided with the structural instability of the premises and likely deaths. A reduction in the response time would therefore make it more likely for both these situations to occur.

Members praised the quality of today's presentations and felt that they would be particularly useful for any induction process. They asked for copies of the presentations in order for them to be shared in other forums. The Director offered to provide officers for such meetings if members so wished.

Policy Planning Forum
9th December, 2013

31/13 Budget 2014/15

Members received a presentation from Mike Griffiths, the Director Resources, on the Authority's revenue budget proposals for 2014/15 to 2017/18. The information provided was based on provisional data since the government settlement was not expected until 18th December, 2013.

The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) from October 2010 had forecasted a 25% reduction in the Fire Service formula grant over the four years 2011/12 to 2014/15. This was 'back-loaded' onto the last two years of the four year period.

West Midlands Fire Service efficiencies had produced savings from Service Support (£3.2m) and Operational (£9.8m).

For 2014/15 there would be a Grant reduction of 7.4%, Council Tax Freeze Grant available (1% for two years) and a Council Tax referendum threshold at 2%.

The National Fire Service CSR impact showed that since 2010/11 cuts had totalled £210m. It was anticipated that over the seven years between 2011/12 – 2017/18 cuts would total £400m.

For 2015/16 a grant reduction of 10% was likely and capital spending, which would now be allocated on a bidding basis, would be reduced from £70m to £45m,

The Chancellor had called for a return to a national budget surplus by 2020 but until that time further local government funding cuts were almost inevitable.

Based on the retention of the Service's current response model and currently predicted cuts, the budget was likely to be in deficit by £0.5m in 2015/15, £3m in 2016/17 and £6m in 2017/18.

The 2014/15 budget setting timetable was reported.

(Meeting ended at 1.00 pm)

Contact Officer: Rosemary Jones Democratic Services Unit Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council 0121 569 3896
