

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

21 MARCH 2016

1. **WEST MIDLANDS COMBINED AUTHORITY
CONSULTATION**

Report of the Clerk to the Authority.

RECOMMENDED

THAT Members note the response submitted on behalf of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) to the West Midlands Combined Authority Consultation (WMCA).

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report is submitted to acknowledge the Authority's response to the consultation recently run by the WMCA, 18 January 2016 – 8 February 2016. The consultation related to the proposed Combined Authority's role and functions and specifically, about the Scheme document that was submitted to the government four months ago.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The WMCA refers to the new governance structure being initiated for the West Midlands by the seven Metropolitan Councils of Birmingham, Coventry, Solihull, Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton.
- 3.2 The WMCA launched a consultation on 18 January 2016 to seek opinion on the roles and functions of the proposed Combined Authority.
- 3.3 The Authority recognises the need for public service reform ensuring that the communities we serve are at the heart of the decision-making and service delivery.

- 3.4 The Authority supports the approach that the WMCA is taking in enabling councils to work together to create benefits to our communities through joined up approaches and delivery in relation to regeneration, economic growth and development and improved transport infrastructure.
- 3.5 In response to the WMCA consultation, the Authority provided a response to the five questions asked and also provided a more comprehensive response as detailed in Appendix 1.
- 3.6 The outcomes of the consultation were released on 16 February 2016. There were over 1,900 responses to the consultation. These responses will support the government's decision regarding whether it is appropriate to form a West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).
- 3.7 Overall, the majority of respondents were supportive of what the WMCA is trying to achieve. The outcomes of the consultation are detailed in Appendix 2.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out. The information set out in this report will no impact on any change in policy.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal implications.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications.

7. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environmental implications.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

WMCA Consultation 18 January 2016
WMCA Devolution Agreement

The contact name for this report is Karen Gowreesunker, telephone number 0121 380 6678.

KAREN GOWREESUNKER
CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority
Response to WMCA Consultation

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA) welcome the opportunity to respond to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) consultation.

In writing this consultation response WMFRA has given consideration to the scheme document and the WMCA devolution agreement, taking note of the respective priorities.

WMFRA recognises the need for public service reform ensuring that the communities we serve are at the heart of decision making and service delivery. Councils working together through the WMCA will create benefit to our communities through joined up approaches and delivery in relation to regeneration, economic growth and development and improved transport infrastructure.

WMFRA supports this approach and would seek to be actively involved in these discussions with the WMCA. We have demonstrated the ability to reform and transform by working with Councils and other partners to deliver innovative, efficient and effective services to our communities. We believe that public services as a whole, not just councils, working together in a Combined Authority can make a real difference to our communities.

We recognise that there is no blueprint for developing connections with the WMCA and the fire and rescue service. WMFRA therefore welcomes continued discussions in relation to the Combined Authority and our involvement within it. As such we would seek to formalise an approach to take forward discussions on the value we can add, future integration and governance issues.

Whilst our services are critical to our communities we recognise and embrace the need for public service reform. Since 2011 we have transformed its services to maintain our service delivery commitment to our communities, but also to meet continued reductions in Government funding. By 2019/20 WMFRA will have seen a 46% (£38m) reduction in Government funding. In order to maintain our core offering we have gone through fundamental internal changes to absorb the reductions. This has seen innovative working both in terms of internal structural change as

well as service delivery. We believe that we can add value should we become an integral part of the WMCA in the future. As an influential partner we currently contribute to reducing vulnerability, protecting the transport infrastructure through rapid response to incidents on our highways and supporting economic growth and stability through our protection and emergency response which provides assertive interventions to limit business and commercial losses from fire.

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP's) demonstrate the desire to support local business and our local economy. Healthy business communities create employment and economic stability and growth. We believe that this is an essential part of creating a sustainable future and is the reason we work closely with businesses, helping to keep businesses in business through our protection services and our emergency response thereby reducing the burden of fire and other incidents and supporting business continuity and resilience. In 2013/14 the cost of dwelling fires, non-dwelling fires and road traffic collisions in the West Midlands stood at £198,651,600. Without our response these costs would spiral with even higher impact upon our communities and the economy. The impact of our response times is not just relative to casualties but also the impact it has on our transport network and critical national infrastructure. We aim for the highest standards of emergency response with a targeted response time of 5 minutes to high risk incidents, where life or property is endangered. This keeps businesses in operating, reduces vulnerability and enables economic stability and growth, demonstrating alignment to the key priorities of the WMCA. The fire service in the West Midlands is not what it was 5 years ago. We deliver a range of services that focus on prevention and protection in the first instance, reducing the cost and the burden on our economy and reducing vulnerability.

We support the continuation of the LEP's and would seek to be actively engaged and involved in these areas of the WMCA.

To achieve the greatest benefits from the creation of the WMCA the right participation is vital. This has to be participation from all relevant stakeholders and we would suggest that purely seeing this as councils is too narrow. We believe that the emergency service sector has a key part to play and that participation should be extended to include emergency services.

Our prevention and protection activities have been at the heart of public service reform, looking at the causes of risk and vulnerability and the wider needs of our communities. We play a significant role in creating economically sustainable communities across the West Midlands. We support the WMCA and look forward to increased involvement with partners across the WMCA from a perspective of improved outcomes for the community, alignment to a WMCA model incorporating public health agencies and access to health and wellbeing commissioning. We believe this would have the potential to deliver connected public services in an effective and efficient way.

Positive Response to WMCA Survey

There were over 1900 responses to the survey that will help government decide whether it is appropriate to form a West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

The survey ran on the WMCA's website for three weeks (18 January to 08 February) and the results have now been fed back to government.

There were five key questions relating to the proposed Combined Authority's role and functions and, specifically, about the Scheme document that was submitted to government three months ago.

Overall, the majority of respondents were in favour of what the incoming WMCA is trying to achieve. Between 60% and 72% of people agreed or strongly agreed that:

- by working together local authorities in the West Midlands would deliver improvements in economic development, regeneration and transport
- better coordination of these areas would mean more effective and convenient local government and services
- the region's Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) would ensure businesses have a strong voice moving forward, and
- neighbouring local authorities should be invited to participate in the WMCA.

An overwhelming 84% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the WMCA should not become a 'super council' and that a Combined Authority for the region should not have an adverse effect on the identities and interests of local communities.

The support for the emerging WMCA was particularly strong amongst businesses with between 75% and 88% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with all five questions in the survey.

Set against the overall support across residents, businesses, elected members and council employees, there were also those

who expressed their concerns about the proposed Combined Authority. Between 24% and 32% of people disagreed or strongly disagreed with the four questions relating to the WMCA's role and functions. Additionally, a wide range of negative comments were expressed in the free text section of the survey which was used by over 800 people. The concerns included the role and powers of a directly elected Mayor, whether there would be cross party unity between participating authorities and the ongoing identity of the WMCA.

Councillor Darren Cooper, Vice Chairman of Shadow West Midlands Combined Authority, said: "This consultation has been incredibly useful and shows that there is certainly an appetite to discuss our plans to become a Combined Authority. It's important that people have a voice and we understand that people want to express a view. To achieve over 1900 responses over a three week period is encouraging and we will now take our time to analyse what people have said and how we can best respond to them.

"In the meantime we have submitted the initial results to government who will consider what people have said and who will ultimately decide whether it is in the region's best interests to form a Combined Authority for the West Midlands."