

<b>Notes of the Policy Planning Forum</b>
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**20<sup>th</sup> January, 2014 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, Auluck, Chambers,  
Clinton, Collingswood, Davis, Delaney, Douglas-  
Maul, Eustace, Finnegan, Hogarth, Quinnen, Sealey,  
Shackleton, Singh, Spence, Tranter, Walsh, Wright,  
Yardley and Young;  
Mr Ager.

**Officers:**       **West Midlands Fire Service**  
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach);  
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales);  
Director Operations (G Taylor);  
Director Resources (M Griffiths);  
Director Human Resources (D Johnson);  
J Connor, M Hamilton-Russell.

**Clerk and Monitoring Officer**  
N Sharma  
R Jones.

**Treasurer**  
Stuart Kellas.

**Apologies:**     Councillors Foster, Mottram and O'Reilly.

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**Chair's and Deputy Chief Fire Officer's Announcements**

The Chair made a number of announcements as follows:-

- Further to Note No. 26/13, a members' room had now been created from what was the old library on the ground floor of the Headquarters building. Members were asked to view it at the end of the meeting;
- Sprinkler Week began on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 2014. Although business and the commercial community were targeted in the main, it also was relevant for community blocks and sheltered housing. He encouraged members to use their offices to pressure the government to introduce sprinklers in appropriate premises.

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On 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2014, members were invited to a seminar arranged by Elaine Borne. There would also be a demonstration around lunchtime. In order for catering to be confirmed, he asked members to let Elaine know whether they would be attending by Monday. A final agenda would be drawn up in the next seven to ten days, with a possible start time of 10.00 am.

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

- There was a suspension of the announcements of dates for further firefighter strike action. The situation seemed to have reached a hiatus. The Service continued with its approach to resource the situation as reported to the Authority meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2013;
- It was hoped that the members' room facilities would provide the right information at the right time for members. A printer was to be installed and members passes were now available;
- Members were asked to get in touch with the Director Human Resources if they had any feedback to the Employee Opinion Survey.

### **2/14 Refresh of The Plan**

Members received a presentation from the Chief Fire Officer, Phil Loach, on proposals for the refresh of The Plan, the Authority's strategic planning document. Claire Kelly had done the work on this based on a forum led by members' requests for items and or information to be discussed. It was a rolling three year strategy and there was no change in its legislative context.

In developing The Plan for 2014-2017 it was reported that:-

- The Strategic Foreword of The Plan would not be altered, just refreshed and reaffirmed.
- Financial challenges to the Service would be reported in a later presentation by the Director Resources.
- Our "risk" based five minute attendance response would become a point of discussion in the future.

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- Developing our people to strive for excellence and be the best they can would continue.
- Evidence based decision making would continue; the Telling Our Story event would contribute to this.
- Personal accountability and contribution would be further developed to enhance management's capability to look after their own staffing.

Our priorities, as set out under "Making West Midlands Safer" would be the subject of further discussions and would obviously be affected by the proposed grant reductions during the years covered by The Plan.

Since there were no significant changes to The Plan, it was proposed to only undertake a short consultation on its refresh, from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2014. In doing this the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee's recent review on consultation would be embraced. Responses would be considered and the draft Plan would be submitted for the approval of the Executive Committee on 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2014.

Members were assured that the consultation, which comprised of three questions, would only be available on the internet and, as such, would involve very little resource to undertake. If the proposed changes to The Plan had been major, a consultation period of twelve weeks would have been required. It was felt that the proposed consultation was good practice and made the strategic planning of the Service transparent to the public.

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### **Refresh of the Plan – Level 2 Action Plans**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Phil Hales, gave a presentation on the planning levels framework within the Service and how these underpinned the delivery of The Plan.

Planning was undertaken at four levels, with Level 1 being The Plan. Level 2 consisted of Corporate Action Plans and Level 3 was function, department, station and team based – all three Levels were rolling three year plans. Level 4 was the Personal Plan (IPDR) and was under constant review.

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The planning templates used at Level 2 were reported and indicated how their structure assisted in ensuring that initiatives were managed by officers. All items had an equality impact assessment, performance and evaluation measures and were related to any interdependency issues with partners. Risk was also evaluated and reported back through the corporate risk framework. The plans were then scrutinised by officers and members before being reported to the Authority.

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### **Refresh of the Plan – Performance Indicators Target Setting**

The Director Operations, Gary Taylor, gave a presentation on Performance Indicators Target Setting. There were 30 Performance Indicators (PIs) which helped to provide measurement of the Service's core delivery and other areas. This evidenced performance against The Plan and enabled the management and monitoring of Level 2 Action Plans.

Indicators and Targets were developed in January for the next financial year. An analysis was done of the previous three year average and a forecast made of the final three months of the current financial year; this included both internal and external influences. At the annual target setting meeting, involving the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, the rationale of the PIs was challenged before the Indicators and targets were confirmed. The Indicators and targets would then be submitted to the Executive Committee for approval (this year's meeting was scheduled for 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2014). Performance was then reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Scrutiny Committee and this assisted in the development of the PIs for the next financial year.

The proposed PIs and targets for 2014/15 were submitted.

It was confirmed that bench marking with other fire authorities was undertaken, although this was not specifically evidenced in the information provided. It was also noted that the number of accidental fires in dwellings had fallen from approximately 2,700 in 2004 to 1,700 in 2013, which was a reflection of the work of the Service with the community to educate them how to protect themselves and prevent such incidents.

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**Budget 2014/15 to 2017/18**

The Director Resources, Mike Griffiths, gave a presentation on the budget position between 2014/15 and 2017/18.

The West Midlands District Leaders' Group on 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2013 had broadly accepted the proposed 2% increase in the Authority's precept for 2014/15 and was informed of the further efficiencies that would be made in relation to shared services, collaboration and asset management.

The provisional finance settlement on 18<sup>th</sup> December, 2013 had confirmed reductions in grant of £5.6m in 2014/15 and £5.8m in 2015/16. The settlement had also announced a 2014/15 Council Tax freeze grant, to be included in future baseline funding and referendum threshold principles to be announced in the new year. Clarification of these principles was still awaited and information to date had suggested that it might be as late as 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2014. This might have implications for the Authority's budget setting on 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2014. Final Council Tax and Business Rates figures would be available on 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2014.

Nationally the Capital Grant for this year had been £70m. For 2015/16 this would fall to £45m all of which was to be allocated on a bid basis. There were no details available for any allocation for 2016/17.

The Authority's provisional capital programme was balanced until 2016/17 and showed a shortfall of £1.1m in 2017/18.

Members enquired as to whether the Authority would need to pay back grant it had received this year if it was not spent. It was reported that these were Section 31 grant monies and were allocated for a particular reason. There was some flexibility on this issue and it would be brought back for further discussion. Monies were allocated based on a Business Case and whether it involved working with others and generated future savings.

With regard to the allocation of 2% of Business Rates to the Authority, it was reported that this was likely to be in the region of £9m. However, this amount would be deducted from whatever the grant was likely to have been set at.

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The Chair commented that due to the lateness of the clarification from the government it was likely that the budget report might need to be updated at the Authority meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2014. Under current predictions the Authority's finances should be viable until 2015/16 but between 2016 and 2018 there could be a deficit of up to £9m. The government was urging authorities to undertake referendums of their communities to ask what services they would wish to have or fund and it might be necessary to consider this course of action in 2016. It was important that preparatory work began for this possibility now.

(Meeting ended at 11.55 am)

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