

<p>Notes of the Policy Planning Forum</p>
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28th March 2011, at 10.30 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham

Present: **Members of the Authority**
Councillors Alden, Chambers, Clinton, Davies, Docker,
Douglas-Maul, Eustace, Foster, A Hill, Hinton,
Hodgson, Idrees, Jackson, Jones, Mulhall, O'Neill,
Ryder, Singh, Spence, Stevenson, Tagger, Turner and
Walsh.
Mr Ager, Mr Denny and Mr Topliss.

Officers: **West Midlands Fire Service**
Chief Fire Officer – V Randeniya.
Deputy Chief Fire Officer – M Clark
A Brandon, M Griffiths, P Loach and D Johnson.

Clerk and Monitoring Officer
N Sharma and S Hancock.

Treasurer
S Kellas.

11/11 Chief Fire Officer's Announcements

Members noted the following announcements:-

- Lindsey Preece had started employment with the Authority today as Press Officer.
- Neil O'Connor, Director for Communities and Local Government, would be visiting the Authority on 4th April 2011 and introducing himself to the Brigade. The Chief Fire Officer had written to him seeking clarification on the future detail of the government's financial settlement.
- Representatives from Lloyds Banking Group had visited the Authority and received a presentation on various pieces of equipment demonstrating the Brigade's capability.

Policy Planning Forum – 28th March 2011

- The International Search and Rescue (ISAR) team had returned from Japan and undertaken critical incident de-briefing with the Occupational Health Unit. Three of the 12 officers deployed had previously returned from Christchurch in New Zealand following its recent earthquake. Support was available to all of the officers if they required it as a consequence of what they had experienced. The Chief Fire Officer described them as some of the best firefighters in the world and praised them for their efforts and dedication in the most difficult and demanding of environments. A training session on urban search and rescue (USAR), organised through the White House, was to be held in Dallas and it was anticipated that the Brigade would be invited. The Chair requested that members of the team be invited to the Authority meeting on 18th April 2011 so that members could personally thank and congratulate them.
- There had been a fatal incident in Pleck, Walsall at 5.13 am at which a 17 year-old female had suffered 40% burns. The Brigade's response time to the incident had been under four minutes.

12/11 Operational Flexibility Options

Members were briefed on three further work packages that had come out of the Building Upon Success Programme.

Low Risk Flexible Crewing

This was a revised approach to whole-time staff provision which took into account the individual profile of each fire station. The approach was tried and tested by a number of other brigades and, if successful in West Midlands, would provide financial savings as well as improved productivity. The proposal was currently being put to staff and representative bodies through a series of roadshows which would inform further development.

Targeted Response Vehicle

A scoping study was underway of the options available for the use of different types of vehicles to respond to incidents.

Enhanced Use of Whole Time Personnel

A scoping study was underway on the possible the use of whole time personnel to respond to incidents from home whilst off-duty. This was also tried and tested by other brigades. The approach would again be dependent upon individual stations' call profiles and also the home locations of firefighters. Members noted that the Grey Book would need to be taken into account when looking at detailed proposals.

13/11 Localism Bill

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer briefed members on the key principles of the new Localism Bill, which was expected to become law at the end of 2011.

The bill proposed greater powers to councils and local communities, particularly on housing and planning matters and would give local authorities a “general power of competence” to enable them to do anything as long as it did not contravene public law. There were some restrictions on how this would operate for fire authorities.

The Standards Board for England would be abolished and there would no longer be a requirement for authorities to have a model code of conduct. However it would be a criminal offence for a member to fail to declare an interest. There was still a duty to maintain standards of conduct and authorities were at liberty to enforce their own voluntary code of conduct. Further consideration was required as to how the authority would oversee member conduct.

Communities would also be given new powers to save services and facilities that were seen as community assets and the right to challenge a local authority, by expressing an interest in running any service for which they are responsible.

Members’ views were sought on public consultations with regard to the proposals on community right to challenge and community right to buy.

(Meeting ended at 11.42 am)

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