

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum
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12 December, 2011 at 10.55 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham

Present: **Members of the Authority**
Councillors Ali Khan, Andrew, Chambers, Clinton,
Davies, Docker, Douglas-Maul, Edwards, Foster,
Griffiths, Hogarth, Idrees, O'Neill, Sandy, Singh,
Spence, Tranter, Turner and Walsh.
Mr Topliss.

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

Clerk and Monitoring Officer
N Sharma, S Kellas and S Hancock.

Apologies: Councillors Alden, Davis, Ryder and Stevenson.

27/11 **Chief Fire Officer and Chair's Announcements**

The Local Government Association was setting up a working group to lead on a lobbying campaign in respect of sprinklers.

The Christmas Carol Concert on 4 December, 2011 had been very successful.

A fire fighter from Coventry had been invited to an event at Buckingham palace to celebrate the 100 year anniversary of Robert Falcon Scott's expedition to the Antarctic. Richard Stanton had won Hero of the Year at the Service's Aspire Awards in 2011 for his expertise in cave rescue. 100 of the UK's "most adventurous explorers" had been invited to the celebration event.

28/11 **Health and Safety – Corporate Responsibility**

Members received a presentation from Madeleine Abas of Osborn Abas Hunt, an organisation providing expert legal advice to

Policy Planning Forum – 12 December, 2011

organisations delivering high hazard services.

Ms Abas outlined the Authority's responsibilities in relation to the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974. The Health and Safety Executive had acknowledged that the nature of the Service's work created challenges in terms of the danger that operational employees were placed in in carrying out their duties; the unpredictability of incidents and the fast decision making required and public expectations.

Fire services had a duty to have in place a robust health and safety management system that:-

- was based upon robust risk assessment;
- set out safe systems of work including equipment, competences and training
- was effectively implemented;
- included arrangements for review;
- consulted employees;
- encouraged feedback.

The Chief Fire Officer assured members that fire fighters undertook rigorous operational training on a daily basis to ensure that they were competent to carry out their duties and that thorough de-briefs took place after incidents, which identified lessons to be learnt where there were any. Fire stations were also subject to regular risk-based inspections.

Osborn Abas Hunt was currently undertaking a review of health and safety management systems within the service and a further report would be presented to members in due course on the outcome.

29/11 Budget and Precept 2012/2013 to 2014/2015

The Director of Finance and Procurement reported that the government had recently confirmed its proposals to offer Fire & Rescue authorities a financial incentive, equivalent of a 3% council tax increase, to freeze council tax for a further year (2012/13). Authorities wishing to increase council tax would be required to undertake a referendum for council tax increases above 4%. Members noted that the financial incentive to freeze council tax was only available for one year.

The implications of both options were discussed and members noted

Policy Planning Forum – 12 December, 2011

the continued uncertainty with regards to the Authority's financial position in 2013/14 and 2014/15. The Chair reported that the Association of Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Authorities (AMFRA) was lobbying the government to make future reductions equal across all fire and rescue authorities.

The district leaders would be meeting on 16 December, 2011, and the Authority would be highlighting the two basic options requiring consideration i.e. to accept the council tax freeze grant or increase council tax by 4 %.

30/11 Brigade Response Vehicles (BRVs)

Members were informed of proposals to trial the use of three Brigade Response Vehicles. The BRVs would be able to respond to smaller incidents where fewer fire fighters were required and would be able to transport fire fighters to incidents as opposed to using a full sized appliance.

Budget cuts and the consequent reduction in fire fighter numbers required new ways of working in order to maintain service standards. The use of BRVs would provide a more agile approach and would ensure that incidents were more appropriately staffed, providing better value for money.

Analysis had found that approximately 20% of incidents could be responded to with BRVs and it was proposed to trial the replacement of two pump rescue ladders with BRVs between the hours of 10pm and 10am at Coventry and Hay Mills stations. The two Targeted Response Vehicles currently based at Dudley and Hay Mills stations would be removed from in order to full assess the trial.

A report would be submitted to the Authority following the completion and analysis of the trail.

(Meeting ended at 1.20 pm)

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