

<p>Minutes of the West Midlands Regional Management Board</p>
--

26th November, 2004 at 10.30 a.m.
at Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service HQ, Pirehill

Present: **Representing Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority**
 Councillors G Davis and Udall;
 Representing Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
 Councillors Austin [Chair], Box [substitute for Councillor Hartin]
 and Lt. Col. Littlejohns;
 Representing Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire Authority
 Councillors K Banks, F Bather and D Davis;
 Representing Warwickshire County Council
 Councillors Haynes, Hobbs and Shilton;
 Representing West Midlands Fire and Civil Defence Authority
 Councillors Eustace, Hinton and Hogarth.

Advisors: Chief Fire Officer Brown (Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service);
 Chief Fire Officer Doig (Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service);
 Chief Fire Officer Kerr (Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service);
 Chief Fire Officer Sheehan (West Midlands Fire Service);
 Chief Fire Officer O'Dwyer (Hereford and Worcester Fire and
 Rescue Service).
 L Bateman (Treasurer);
 J Gregory (Legal Advisor);
 S Worrall (Programme Manager).

Visitors: Jean Cole and Simon Smith (Government Office West Midlands);
 Les Oliver and Kath Robjohns (FireLink Project National Team);
 Maxine Laughner and Trevor Shanahan (Fire Brigades Union);
 Peter Dartford and Ray Kings (Regional FireControl Project Team).

Observers: Councillor T Jebb;
 Messrs P McCafferey and A Rotchell.

Apologies: Councillors Hartin and Taylor; Nigel Summers (Clerk).

29/04 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair outlined the main points raised at a recent meeting of Chairs of Regional Management Boards.

Issues had been raised with regard to the financial implications of modernisation for Fire Authorities and Regional Management Boards,

West Midlands Regional Management Board
26th November, 2004

and a letter outlining these concerns was to be sent to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The meeting had looked at the implications of the result of the recent referendum on regional government in the North East for regional working by fire authorities. Collaborative working was expected to continue.

Chairs had expressed disappointment with the short timescales allowed for responses from Fire Authorities on the Outline Business Case for the FireControl project.

A national resilience seminar on New Dimension was to be held on 28th January, 2005 in London. Councillor Ann Gallop had been appointed to represent the Local Government Association on the New Dimension Sounding Board.

Detailed proposals would be circulated shortly for a revised constitution for the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services.

30/04 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 24th September, 2004 be confirmed as a correct record.

31/04 **Firelink Project**

Les Oliver and Kath Robjohns from the Firelink Central Area Delivery Team gave a presentation on progress with the development of the Firelink project.

Firelink was a national digital radio communication link designed to contribute to national resilience. The project would ensure the operational continuity of existing communications systems in the run up to awarding a contract for the roll-out of a new national radio link. It was anticipated that the West Midlands region would be fourth in the roll-out of the new system, with work expected to commence in the region in the last quarter of 2006, for completion early in 2007.

There was continuing consultation with users on the development of

West Midlands Regional Management Board
26th November, 2004

the project, and close links with the FireControl and New Dimension project teams.

The Team was in the process of producing a handbook for users of Firelink, and would shortly be providing details of funding arrangements and likely costs and exact delivery dates within the regions. A national seminar was to be held early in the New Year.

Members asked a number of questions on the proposals:

- How firm are the anticipated roll-out dates?
The anticipated timescales had been agreed by the two proposers who had been selected to tender for the work.
- How resilient is the proposed network?
An answer would be obtained on this point.
- What safeguards will exist in the event of breakdown of the system?
The specification for Firelink was very stringent and the proposers were confident they could meet the specification.
- The current proposals are not as far-reaching as was originally proposed. What provision will be made for regions and authorities who require enhanced services? Will a core service be defined, and what will be its cost?
Provision for 'call-off' would be built into the arrangements and consultation was ongoing on this point. No information was available on the definition of a 'core service' but it was anticipated it would include radio infrastructure and installation into terminals. The FireControl project had impacted on what had been envisaged as core services at the outset.
- What provision was being made for the funding of the shoring up of existing radio systems?
This was being addressed through the operational continuity project which was funded centrally.
- What arrangements were proposed for penalties to be incurred by contractors in the event of delays in delivery or failure of the system? Would regions be able to recoup any losses?
An answer would be obtained on this point.
- Were the project team satisfied that the proposers could deliver the project?
The proposers were selected through a competitive processes designed to ensure probity and deliverability.

The Board thanked the presenters for their attendance.

West Midlands Regional Management Board
26th November, 2004

32/04 **Fire Brigades Union(FBU) – Partnership Working on Lifelong Learning**

Trevor Shanahan and Maxine Laugher gave a presentation on the Union Learning Fund project that was running successfully in Scotland and was now to be rolled out to England and Wales. The project involved a number of partners including the Learning and Skills Council, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Fire Service College.

The aim of the project was to work with brigades to improve the skills and productivity of the workforce; to ensure access to learning opportunities; to improve access to learning through ICT; and to establish and support a network of trained union learning representatives. The benefits of the project would accrue to individual participants but employers would also reap the benefits of an improved learning culture and a more skilled workforce.

The FBU were seeking support for the recruitment of five union learning representatives for each Brigade, whose role would be to carry out a learning needs analysis and marketing and implementation of the initiative. It was proposed to establish strategic steering committees that would involve all stakeholders and steer the direction of the project.

The Board felt that further discussion was needed at a regional level on how the initiative would fit with existing training programmes and on the cost implications for individual Brigades.

The Board thanked the presenters for their attendance.

33/04 **Meetings of the Programme Board**

The Board approved the minutes of the meetings of the Programme Board held on 24th August and 26th October, 2004.

34/04 **FireControl Project**

The Board received a presentation from Peter Dartford, Project Director for the regional FireControl project on the national FireControl

West Midlands Regional Management Board
26th November, 2004

project.

Since the last meeting of the Board there had been an announcement that the roll-out of the project to the West Midlands region would take place in the third quarter of 2007, and the Outline Business Case had been issued to Regional Management Board Chairs for consultation. The Finance Working Group had also issued a consultation document on governance and financial issues.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had also invited bids for funding for new burdens but the timescale for submissions was very short. A bid for funding to support the regional project delivery team had been submitted via the Regional Treasurers Group and a response was awaited. Assurances were given that bids had been drawn up according to a similar framework and were consistent across the regions.

The Board now needed to decide its views on the key issues outlined in the consultation documents.

The Board was concerned that it was being asked to give an informed and consolidated regional view on the Outline Business Case and other financial issues when financial information was still being withheld as commercial in confidence. Some information had been sent to the Chair, and it was agreed that this would be made available on a 'need-to-know' basis.

The timescale for a response to the consultation was short, and it was proposed that a response to the consultation documents be drawn up by the regional FireControl Project Board at its meeting to be held on 15th December, 2004. Individual Fire and Rescue Service representatives on the Project Board would need to be briefed appropriately in time for the meeting.

The Board had also been asked to comment on the form of the lease for Regional Control Centres. This work was in hand, and it was proposed to engage solicitors nationally as part of the exercise. There would be a small charge to each Fire Authority to meet the cost involved.

It was suggested that there should also be a consistent approach to consultation with existing control centre staff and that the Board needed to be involved with this. Assurances were given that this was

West Midlands Regional Management Board
26th November, 2004

being dealt with through the Human Resources workstream in the regional project on which each Brigade was represented.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the regional FireControl Project Board be authorised to draw up a response to the various consultation documents for approval by the Chair on behalf of the Regional Management Board; and
- (2) that individual Fire Authorities note that there will be small charge to each Authority in respect of legal work in connection with the ODPM consultation on the terms for the lease of Regional Control Centres.

35/04 **End of Tranche Review 2**

The Board received a report setting out progress with the Modernisation Programme and the seven existing projects within the Programme for the period 1st September to 31st October, 2004.

The Chair as Senior Responsible Owner for the overall modernisation programme drew Members' attention to the detail of the report, and indicated that there was slippage in the programme as a result of uncertainties around national projects such as Firelink and FireControl, and where guidance was awaited on procurement and human resources issues, all of which impacted on regional projects.

Following a discussion at a recent meeting of West Midlands Authority Chairs and Chief Fire Officers on outcomes from the programme, a report was to be brought to the next Programme Board on projects which could be prioritised for urgent action at no extra cost.

Jean Cole, Business Change Manager for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister indicated that the Board was making sound progress. Ministers had asked for a progress report in December, 2004 detailing progress against the six workstreams within the programme with a view to identifying best practice.

There was a discussion on anticipated outcomes from the programme. It was suggested that the 2005/06 National Framework document may be useful in prioritising outcomes.

West Midlands Regional Management Board
26th November, 2004

36/04 **Correspondence Relating to the Regional Management Board**

None received.

37/04 **Dates of Meetings of the Regional Management Board and the Programme Board 2005**

Submitted – a suggested programme of meetings for the Regional Management Board and the Programme Board for 2005.

Resolved that the programme of meetings set out in the attached Appendix be approved.

38/04 **Trade Union Engagement**

Further to the discussion at the Programme Board meeting of 26th November, 2004 on a strategy for communication with stakeholder groups, the Board considered a report proposing that effective consultation and negotiation arrangements now be established for the region. Any approach would need to be harmonised with arrangements being negotiated within individual Fire and Rescue Services and be consistent with revised national arrangements.

An informal approach had been made to trade unions and their reply was awaited.

Resolved that a Task Group comprising the Chairs from each constituent Fire Authority (or their nominee) be established to develop effective regional arrangements to secure trade union engagement, reporting through the Human Resource Management Project Board, and that the Task Group report back on progress in eight week's time.

(Meeting ended at 1.10 p.m.)

<i>Contact Officer: Georgina Wythes Democratic Services Unit Sandwell MBC</i>

West Midlands Regional Management Board
26th November, 2004

0121-569 3791

West Midlands Regional Management Board

Programme of Meetings 2005

Regional Management Board

All commence at 10.30 am

<i>Date of Meeting</i>	<i>Host</i>
25th January 2005	Shropshire
29th April 2005	West Midlands
26th July 2005	Staffordshire
28th October 2005	Hereford and Worcester

**NB The Annual Meeting of the WMRMB will be held on
Friday, 10th June, 2005 [venue tba]**

Programme Board

Not open to the public/press

All commence at 10.30 am

<i>Date of Meeting</i>	<i>Host</i>
11th January 2005	Staffordshire
22nd March 2005	Hereford & Worcester
21st June 2005	Warwickshire
20th September 2005	Shropshire