

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**26 March, 2012 at 10.30 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham**

Present: Members of the Authority

Councillors Alden, Andrew, Chambers, Clinton, Davies, Davis, Docker, Douglas-Maul, Edwards, Foster, Griffiths, Hogarth, O'Neill, Sandy, Singh, Stevenson, Turner and Walsh.
Messrs Ager, Denny and Topliss.

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service

Chief Fire Officer – V Randeniya.
Assistant Chief Fire Officers P Hales, P Loach and D Walton. M Griffiths and D Johnson.

Clerk and Monitoring Officer

N Sharma and S Hancock.

Treasurer

S Kellas.

Apologies: Councillors Eustace, Idrees, Lines, Ryder, Spence and Tranter.

8/12

Announcements

The Chair reported on the Local Government Association Fire Conference. Members and officers had taken the opportunity to raise the concerns about the Authority's budget with the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor, Sir Ken Knight. Chiefs of metropolitan fire and rescue authorities and local MPs had also met with the Fire Minister, Bob Neale MP and re-iterated the same concerns. The Chair and the Chief Fire Officer would again be meeting with Mr Neale on 27 March, 2012 and would re-iterate the same points. Officials from the Treasury were due to visit the Academy on 30 March, 2012 and the opportunity would again be taken to continue the lobbying.

The Chief Fire Officer reported on the tragic motor way accident involving a lorry and a coach which had happened on the M5 on 24 March, 2012. Officers from Cradley Heath, Halesowen and Woodgate Valley had attended the incident.

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The Chief Fire Officer reported on a Young Fire Fighters' Association Passing Out Parade that he had recently attended in Sutton Coldfield. 12 young fire fighters, including some with learning and behavioural needs, had successfully completed a 20 week programme. Members would be invited to the next event.

9/12

Cradley Heath and Halesowen Fire Stations

Members received an update on progress with regards to the replacement of Cradley Heath and Halesowen Fire Stations with a single fire station.

Throughout March, 2012, a number of information sessions had been held in the two communities for the public. Members noted that confirmation had been received that the Authority was no longer under threat of Judicial Review from a local action group regarding the consultation process on its decision to reduce the number of appliances on the new station from two to one. An evaluation of the consultation process would however be undertaken to see if any lessons could be learnt.

A number of options had been considered with regards to the new single fire station, which included the refurbishment of the existing Cradley Heath station and renting alternative premises. However, the preferred option was to build a new purpose built facility on a new site. An independent agent had been appointed to research potential sites and a report would be presented to the Authority meeting on 16 April, 2012, setting out the agent's findings and recommending a course of action.

10/12

Collaboration with Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority

It was reported that the Project Board had received a grant of £3.6million from the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) towards its work on developing a joint fire control system. This was £500,000 short of the amount bid for and officers expressed disappointment at the approach that CLG had taken in the allocation of funding.

The Board was currently working on its Project Plan and the development of an interim fire control solution by November, 2012.

11/12 Revised Standards Regime

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer updated members on forthcoming changes to the standards regime under the Localism Act.

It was reported that the Localism Act had received Royal Assent on 15 November, 2011 and the changes regarding standards were expected to be implemented with effect from 1 July, 2012.

The Act placed general obligations on authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members. The Authority had a duty to adopt a code of conduct that was consistent with the statutory principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. There was also a requirement for the Authority to make arrangements for investigating and taking decisions on allegations of a breach of the code. The provisions included the appointment of at least one independent person whose views were to be sought and taken into account prior to a decision being made.

The Standards Committee had considered the implications of the Act and would be making recommendations to the Authority at its annual meeting on 25 June, 2012.

(Meeting ended at 12.09 pm)

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