

## Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**09 October 2017 at 10.30 am  
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

Present: Members of the Authority  
Councillor Edwards (Chair)  
Councillor Idrees (Vice Chair)  
Councillors Allcock, Aston, Atwal Singh, Barlow, Barrie,  
Booth, Brackenridge, Cartwright, Craddock, Hogarth,  
Miks, Mottram, P Singh, T Singh, Spence, Walsh, and  
Williams  
Mr Ager

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service  
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach)  
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales)  
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor)  
B Brook, P Fellows, M Hamilton-Russell, Neil Spencer,  
S Taylor, S Timmington, S Vincent, and S Warnes

### **Clerk and Monitoring Officer**

K Gowreesunker (Clerk)  
S Sahota (Monitoring Officer)

Apologies: Councillors Clinton, Davis, Eustace, Male, Sealey,  
Tranter, and Young

M Griffiths (Treasurer),

Observers: H Begum, J Round

### **20/17 Chair and CFO Announcements**

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the Policy Planning Forum.

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**21/17 Governance Update**

Cllr John Edwards, Chair of WMFRA, and Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Authority, presented an update on the subject of future governance:

The Mayoral Governance report had been submitted at the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board Meeting where the governance review and scheme were approved (the governance review explained why the proposed change; the scheme detailed how the proposed change would be made).

The governance review and scheme were being finalised and would be submitted to the seven Local Authorities for consideration and for approval. The governance review and scheme would be considered by the Cabinet first and then full Council (there were some variations in the process at Sandwell Council and Walsall Council).

Public consultation would be undertaken between January and the middle of February 2018 (the whole exercise would take until March). The purpose of the consultation would be to ask the wider public to consider the proposals and the outcomes of the consultation would form the basis of the submission to the Secretary of State who would consider the consultation feedback against what the Authority was proposing. The Secretary of State would then put forward a model for the governance of the Authority.

In answer to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- It was envisaged that both a Reformed Fire Authority (RFA) and a Mayoral Fire Advisory Committee (MFAC) would comprise of 15 Members plus a number of co-opted members. There was a keenness to ensure that either model represented the composition of the West Midlands. However, a further reduction in numbers could be proposed by the Secretary of State.
- The proposal for a RFA was separate to that of a MFAC. It was intended that a RFA would be an interim

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measure, and its implementation would be largely dependent on the progress of the Mayoral WMCA governance route. There was the potential that the governance model could move straight to Mayoral WMCA governance if timings were close.

- The governance review and scheme would be issued to all Members in advance of their respective Council meetings. All Members were advised to check with Officers within their Local Authorities regarding their position in such meetings, as Members of the Fire Authority they would need to disclose their interests at Council.

### **22/17 How we are Progressing in Delivering the Objectives of The Plan**

Gary Taylor, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, delivered a presentation on how the Service was progressing in delivering the objectives of The Plan:

- Prevention

The Service continued to strive to reduce risk and tackle vulnerability. The Service had observed reductions in the number of accidental dwelling fires, injuries and fatalities. Nationally the number of incidents had plateaued and had started to increase. The Service had strived to continue the reduction in the number of incidents etc and this was reflected in the performance over the last six months, although the rate the numbers were reducing had slowed down.

Fire Investigation aim to discover the causes of fires. Fire Investigation were working closely with coroners. The Service would be holding a conference in November 2017 with all of the coroners in the West Midlands where they would be asked to consider fire safety and fire prevention when producing and issuing coroner letters.

The Safe and Well visit was a key initiative of the Service. It provided a wider scope, looking at the causes of the causes.

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This including looking at any underlying causes rather than simply installing a smoke alarm and advising occupants of escape routes. The Safe and Well visits tied in with the Service's approach incorporating the Marmot Principles; taking a more person focussed approach and looking at the wider picture to understand factors such as lifestyle and habits.

Reflecting the Service's commitment to the Safe and Well visits and in tackling risk and vulnerability, the targets for the two corporate performance indicators covering this area had been increased. Safe and Well visits were offered to all members of the public within the West Midlands but there was a need to focus on those who were the most vulnerable, to which partnerships were key. As a result, the performance indicator target for the percentage of Safe and Well visits referred by partners had been increased from 40% to 50%. The target had not been met yet but the percentage would continue to increase.

The majority of arson performance indicators had previously been over target. Arson was not a specific issue for the Service to solely tackle. As a result of the performance within this area, the Service had reviewed the situation and developed focussed arson plans for local commands. This had resulted in an impact upon the number of arson related incidents which had decreased. Actions within the arson plans included sharing the local arson picture with Section 41 Members and all Members were encouraged to liaise with their Local Authorities to help address arson related incidents.

The number of arson incidents in non-domestic premises had previously been very high with approximately half of all incidents occurring within HMP Birmingham. The Service had liaised with the prison and it had reviewed its approach to fire safety. The number of arson incidents were currently half of what had been previously recorded.

The Service remained committed to reducing the number of road safety incidents and were working with the West Midlands Combined Authority on the road safety strategy.

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The Service continued to work within the wider health activity including 'Back Home Safe and Well' visits and falls response. These initiatives helped to reduce pressures on other services and to support the system.

The trials had been affected by national pay discussion and a consequence of this had been the withdrawal of local support from representative bodies. Business continuity plans had been implemented to enable continuity of services to local communities. These had ensured no impact on the delivery of services and contractual commitments.

- Protection

The Service had developed an integrated approach to business engagement. When attending premises, Fire Safety Officers would consider vulnerability and feedback to the prevention teams where applicable. The Service was also developing a programme to ensure firefighters had fire safety knowledge which would allow them to deal with non-complex fire safety issues.

Business Support Vehicles (BSV) had been introduced into the Service in 2015. BSVs were crewed by a Fire Safety Officer and attended the majority of automatic fire alarms, engaging with owners and to look at other fire safety issues. Over 99% of automatic fire alarms were wasted calls. The BSVs supported the Service Delivery Model by protecting the fleet so that it could attend other incidents.

The number of accidental non-domestic fires had decreased. In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire, the Service had co-ordinated the national checks of high rise premises for similar cladding / fire safety concerns. The Service had worked as a taskforce with Local Authorities where such cladding had been found. Additionally, as part of the Site Specific Risk Inspection programme, inspections of high rise premises had been prioritised, with operational crews visiting from local fire stations along with a Fire Safety Officer and the responsible person for the premises, to develop a plan in preparation for if an incident was to occur.

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- Response

The Service Delivery Model was the Service's offer to the public, it was part of the brand which ensured public trust, allowing the Service to carry out its prevention and protection activities.

The number of incidents had declined but incidents would continue to happen. In the event that an incident did occur, the Service would need to respond rapidly in a safe, effective and assertive manner. This was backed up by the evidence of survivability in the event of a fire.

At a time when some Fire and Rescue Services were witnessing increases in attendance times, the Service's median response time to category one incident types was currently 4 minutes 41 seconds.

The Service was seeking to reduce response times further. The call handling arrangements for Fire Control had previously included a target of managing 90% of calls within 90 seconds. This target had been lowered to managing 90% of calls within 80 seconds (a target which had been met).

Work was also ongoing in other ways to reduce response times such as the introduction of the mobilising system Vision 4 and a pre-alert system which would notify crews that an emergency call was incoming (allowing firefighters to prepare to be mobilised e.g. halting activities such as training).

The new staffing model had proved to be effective and as a result, fleet availability was 99.28%, which supported response times.

In answer to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- The Service believes in the installation of sprinkler systems wherever possible, including the retrofitting of such systems.

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- Crews were mobilised to falls response calls as part of a telecare package. In the majority of cases, the person who had fallen would activate a pendant which would alert the telecare team. A member of the telecare team would contact the person to ascertain the situation and the caller would judge if the person was hurt or not. The telecare team would notify Fire Control and a crew would then be mobilised accordingly.
- The Service was taking a pro-active approach to falls response, creating a referral pathway rather than waiting for individuals to suffer falls.
- Initiatives such as the falls response and Back Home Safe and Well visits were proving to be successful in supporting other services and reducing some of the pressures. The triage of calls had proved to be very effective. A good relationship and level of understanding had been developed between the Service and the Ambulance Service as part of this work.
- The Service had changed its approach to its road safety education activities to incorporate new technology including virtual reality, tailoring the content to the audience e.g. the use of such technology was often more appealing to young male drivers, who were a key target audience.
- Parking around schools, particularly at the start and end of the school day, was a good example of where education and enforcement join up, engineering solutions and encouraging behavioural change by explaining the impacts of behaviours / actions.

The meeting closed at 11:31 hours.

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