

Minutes of the Meeting of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

**16 April, 2012 at 11.00 am
at the Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham**

Present: Councillor Edwards [Chair];
Councillors Alden, Andrew, Chambers, Clinton, Davies,
Davis, Docker, Finnegan, Foster, Griffiths, Hogarth,
Idrees, Lines, O'Neill, Ryder, Sandy, Singh, Spence,
Stevenson, Tranter, Turner and Walsh.

Observers: Messrs Ager, Denny and Topliss.

27/12 Declaration of Interests

The Chief Fire Officer declared a personal interest in Minute No 35/12 [Additional Appointments – Chief Fire Officer] below.

The Chief Fire Officer and his principal officers declared a personal interest in Minute No 45/12 [Review of Allowances and Expenses] below.

28/12 Chair's Announcements

The Chair reported that he and the Chief Fire Officer and Director of Finance and Procurement had recently met with Ian Austin MP and the Fire Minister Bob Neill as part of the ongoing lobbying for a fair financial settlement for metropolitan fire authorities. Lobbying would continue and the Association of Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Authorities would meet again in September to review the position.

The Chair announced that Philip Hales and Philip Loach had been appointed to substantive posts of Assistant Chief Fire Officer on 29 March 2012. Members congratulated Mr Hales and Mr Loach on their appointments. Reference was made to the high calibre of applicants for these two posts.

29/12 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 February, 2012, be confirmed as a correct record.

30/12 Instigation of Legal Proceedings

The Authority was informed that the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair, had decided to instigate legal proceedings in respect of a breach of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety Order 2005).

31/12 Implementation of Dual Staffing of Special Appliances

The Authority was informed that dual staffing of special appliances and front line pump rescue ladders had been successfully implemented. The initiative had arisen from a Building upon Success Programme review of operational response, crewing and mobilisation arrangements for special appliances.

Special appliances such as hydraulic platforms and prime movers of demountable units had been continually staffed by a crew commander and a firefighter. This had required a total of 96 personnel to staff all the special appliances. Under the new arrangement special appliances were crewed by two firefighters from an existing pump rescue ladder [PRL] [a conventional fire engine usually staffed by four or five personnel]. The PRL assumed the status of a temporary Brigade Response Vehicle [BRV], dealing with a different range of incidents, until such time that it was again fully crewed. BRVs had been introduced on a trial basis following a successful pilot for similar vehicles at Dudley and Haymills fire stations. These had operated with a crew of three and dealt with mainly minor incidents such as secondary fires involving rubbish and grass and had proved to be an effective means of responding to small scale incidents.

The dual staffing arrangements had been implemented in two stages and had been fully evaluated. Attendance times for special appliances compared with the same period last year were slightly longer but the appliances had further to travel and PRLs would already be in attendance.

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The initiative had provided the foundations for more efficient and effective use of resources that supported the reducing workforce. Total salary savings of £3.6m had been achieved.

Members asked for response times and BRV activity to be monitored further. Assurances were given that this was a regular part of Brigade performance monitoring and evaluation.

32/12 Policy Statement - Injury Awards for Local Government Pension Scheme Members

The Authority considered a draft Policy Statement with regard to injury awards, which had been produced in accordance with Regulation 14 of the Local Government (Discretionary Payments)(Injury Allowances) Regulations 2011. The statement was applicable to all employees of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority who were eligible to be members of the Local Government Pension Scheme. No allowance was payable under the regulations where in the opinion of the West Midlands Fire Service an employee received an injury mainly as a result of their own serious and culpable negligence and misconduct.

Resolved that the Policy Statement on Injury Awards, as now submitted, be approved for inclusion in the Pay Policy Statement.

33/12 Cradley Heath and Halesowen Project - New Fire Station

Further to Minute No 83/11 [28 November 2011], the Authority received a report outlining the options available to develop a new fire station to serve the communities of Cradley Heath and Halesowen.

Two information sharing events had been held for the public during March 2012 to provide information on what a new fire station could look like and the community benefits of a new facility. Further work had also taken place on the options for future development of the new fire station, examining the respective strengths and weaknesses and the feasibility of each option.

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The options were:

- Option 1 – build a new fire station on the existing site at Cradley Heath
It was recommended that this option be rejected on the basis that the restrictions of the current footprint, potential planning restrictions and disruption of services during development of the site did not make development of the site cost effective. The site had no connections with the communities of Halesowen and did not meet the intended outcomes of the station merger.
- Option 2 – Build a new fire station on a new site
It was recommended that the Authority approve this option.
- Option 3 – Rent suitable premises
It was recommended that this option be rejected on the basis that the development would be too restricted by the contractual parameters of a rental agreement.
- Option 4 – Develop a purpose-built multi-agency site
It was recommended that this option be considered as part of the preferred option [option 2].
- Option 5 – Refurbish Cradley Heath Fire Station
It was recommended that this option be rejected as the existing building and the footprint restrict the ability to provide a fire station that reflects community and prevention responsibilities and would not be cost effective. The site did not have any connections with the communities of Halesowen and did not meet the intended outcomes of the station merger.

Option 2 would allow the purchase of land within an acceptable risk area and the construction of a purpose built fire station which met the needs of the Service and the community. This option had been developed on the basis of a single appliance multi-bay fire station. Energy efficiencies could be realised in the design of the station. It might also be possible to explore partnership options as part of the proposals. The existing Cradley Heath fire station could maintain service provision while the new fire station was being built. Income from the sale of the Cradley Heath and Halesowen sites would offset some of the capital expenditure. Any approval to purchase land would be subject to cost, full planning permission, ground investigation surveys, availability of utilities, conveyances and procurement procedures.

A full equality impact assessment had been undertaken and did not identify any significant adverse impact upon the personal characteristic groups. Consultation with affected employees would

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be carried out as necessary.

The capital cost of the preferred option was approximately £3m for which funding was available in the Capital Programme. Capital receipts would be generated by the disposal of the existing sites. There would also be savings on planned maintenance for the Cradley Heath and Halesowen fire stations already provided for in the budget.

Members asked questions on the report and received responses.

Resolved:

- (1) that the purchase of a new site for the future development of a single appliance multi-bay fire station to serve the communities of Cradley Heath and Halesowen [Option 2] be approved;
- (2) that this option be considered further in the private session of this meeting due to the commercially sensitive nature of the information to be considered.

34/12 Communities and Local Government Grant Funding for Fire Control Collaboration

The Authority was advised that a joint funding bid had been submitted to the Department of Communities and Local Government [CLG] by this Authority and the Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority, for delivering fire control services, following the termination of the national Fire Control Project by Government. A joint bid of £4.2m had been submitted to deliver improved resilience, enhanced technology and efficiencies through a shared service approach. CLG had approved the funding application but had awarded only £3.6m, which was consistent with other approved bids. Early indications were that the reduced funding would not significantly affect the collaboration. CLG had indicated that they were in discussion with the Local Government Association and the Chief Fire Officers' Association on how best to monitor and support these fire control projects.

35/12 Additional Appointments – Chief Fire Officer

The Authority was reminded that the Chief Fire Officer had been

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elected to the Presidential Team of the Chief Fire Officers' Association [CFOA] in August 2010. He had served as Vice President elect from September 2010; as Vice President from September 2011; and was due to take on the role as President from September 2012 to September 2013.

CFOA was the professional voice of the UK Fire and Rescue Service and the Chief Fire Officer's role in the presidential team provided opportunities to work at a national level and to promote the West Midlands Fire Service in a wider context. The personal time commitment was significant but there were many compensating benefits to the service.

The Chief Fire Officer also served as Chair of the Governing Body of the Birmingham Metropolitan College.

Resolved:

- (1) that endorsement of the Chief Fire Officer's role within the Chief Fire Officers' Association Presidential Team be affirmed and that he be congratulated on his achievement;
- (2) that approval be given in respect of the Chief Fire Officer's role as Chair/Member of the Governing Body of the Birmingham Metropolitan College and that he be authorised to take special leave to undertake public duties in respect of this role.

36/12 Minutes of the Executive Committee

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March, 2012 were received, subject to the addition of Councillor Alden to the list of apologies.

37/12 Minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 March, 2012 were received.

38/12 Notes of the Joint Consultative Panel

The notes of the meeting held on 5 March, 2012 were received.

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39/12 Minutes of the Principal Officers' Staffing Committee

The minutes of the meetings held on 23 and 29 March, 2012 were received.

40/12 Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

The notes of the meeting held on 26 March, 2012 were received.

41/12 Notes of the Member Development Working Group

The notes of the meeting held on 13 February, 2012 were received.

42/12 Councillor J Stevenson

The Chair referred to Councillor Stevenson's decision to retire at the forthcoming local election, thanked her for her contribution to the work of the Authority over a number of years, and wished her well in the future. Members supported his comments.

43/12 Exclusion of the Public and Press

Resolved that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information); and relating to any consultations or negotiations or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under the authority.

44/12 Contract Awards Summary September 2011 to March 2012

The Authority received a summary of all contracts awarded between 1 September 2011 and 31 March 2012.

45/12 Review of Allowances and Expenses

The Authority considered a number of proposals to revise or remove a range of allowances and expenses currently paid to employees.

Employees classified as essential users who no longer met the criteria set out in the relevant standing order were also to be reclassified as casual car users; and existing pool cars would be better utilized which would result in a reduction in casual car usage. These actions would further reduce expenditure on allowances and expenses.

The proposed changes were subject to further consultation with the trades unions.

The proposals would be implemented on a phased basis and would be fully operational by 1 April 2013 and would generate savings of approximately £200,000 per annum.

The Chair indicated that a proposal would be submitted to the annual meeting of the Authority to suspend payment of allowances to members for travel within the West Midlands area.

Resolved:

- (1) that with effect from 1 April, 2013, the practice of paying home to work/work to home mileage be revised so that officers are paid only for excess mileage incurred when travelling home to work/work to home; and that with effect from 1 October, 2012, a 50% cap be applied to the amount of home to work/work to home mileage that any officer can claim;
- (2) that payment of Essential User, Casual User and other mileage claims [claims for occasional work-related journeys by employees who are not designated essential or casual car users] be reimbursed at the standard HMRC rate;
- (3) that the payment of essential telephone allowances cease except where an individual officer is able to demonstrate that he/she is genuinely unable to receive a mobile phone signal at home;
- (4) that the time period for the payment of travel expenses following compulsory transfer be brought into line with West

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Midlands Fire Service policy on protection of earnings;

- (5) that a proposal be formulated to consider whether savings could be achieved via the provision of leased vehicles to essential car users who undertake high business mileage;
- (6) that the general lease car scheme be discontinued.

46/12 Cradley Heath and Halesowen Project – New Fire Station

Further to Minute No 4/12, the Authority considered further information in respect of potential sites for a new fire station for the communities of Cradley Heath and Halesowen.

Resolved that further investigation of the potential sites take place with a view to identifying a preferred site for approval by the Authority.

(Meeting ended at 12 noon)

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