

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**12 December 2016 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, Barrie, Booth,
Brackenridge, Clinton, Craddock, Davis, Mottram, P Singh, T
Singh, and Tranter

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach)
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor)
M Griffiths (Treasurer),
J Connor, M Ward-White, S Timmington, S Vincent

Clerk and Monitoring Officer

K Gowreesunker (Clerk)
S Sahota (Monitoring Officer)

Apologies: Councillors: Barlow, Bennett, Cartwright, Dad, Eustace,
Hogarth, B Singh, Sealey, Skinner, Spence, Walsh and Young
Mr Ager

Observers: Nil

24/16 Chair and CFO Announcements

The Chief Fire Officer welcomed all attendees to the Policy Planning Forum.

The Chief Fire Officer thanked all who had attended the Recognition and Awards event, and the West Midlands Fire Service carol service.

The recent National Fire Awards had seen West Midlands Fire Service collect the award for training provider of the year, and Preith Shergill, Strategic Enabler Business Development had received the award for most influential BME person in the UK.

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25/16 Conditions of Service for Fire and Rescue Staff: Independent Review – ‘The Thomas Review’

Steve Vincent, Strategic Enabler Organisational Assurance, delivered a presentation on the Adrian Thomas Review, ‘Conditions of service for fire and rescue staff: independent review’:

The review was commissioned by the former Fire Minister, MP Penny Mordaunt, and formally launched in October 2014. The report was originally to be published in the spring of 2015 but was published in autumn 2016.

The review covered the following areas:

- The working environment
- Conditions of service
- Industrial relations
- Retained duty system, ‘On Call’
- Management of the Fire and Rescue Sector

The findings of the review included:

Working environment

- Culture and trust are key to creating high performance but there was a perception that it was mixed in the Fire and Rescue sector. It was highlighted that culture and trust should be explicit in management objectives. It was noted that the OpA Fire Peer Challenge Team found the leadership of the Service to be strong and unique.
- Engagement with representative bodies was important. It was noted that the Service had excellent relationships with all representative bodies.
- Working relationships and communication was key. The Service had increased the ability and choice of styles of communication through technology, enabling its employees further. Examples included the ‘What’s Happening’ intranet site, station visits and the increased use of software such as Skype. The review also cited the need to undertake the analysis of the effectiveness of communications.
- A need to understand unconscious bias was recognised. It was noted that the Service had already commenced work within this subject, particularly within SET and through the leadership programme.
- The review claimed that 40% of firefighters (16,000) had suffered from bullying and harassment during their service. It

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was noted that this statistic did not bare any resemblance to the analysis undertaken by WMFS.

Conditions of Service

- The review questioned the need for the National Joint Council (NJC). It was noted that WMFS fully supported the NJC. It was also referenced that not all trade unions had a voice at the NJC, although this had not been the experience of WMFS.
- Adrian Thomas views the 'Grey Book' as a collective agreement and not a set of conditions, and that it is seen culturally as a barrier to alternative staffing models and the role map is seen as restrictive in undertaking wider areas of work. Indeed, the review questions if the sector needs the Gold, Grey and Green book of conditions.

Industrial Relations

- The review suggested that firefighters should not have the right to strike with reference to attending 999 incidents, but that such a proposal should not lead to the right to strike being removed fully. It was noted that the Home Office had subsequently indicated that the Government did not wish to pursue such an option.

Retained Duty System – 'On Call'

- The review recommends the need for an annual return to be provided by Fire and Rescue Services recording the number of retained duty system staff or reasons why such staff were not used.
- The review suggests that the use of the retained duty system may be a way of creating a more diverse workforce. It was noted that this was often not the experience of services who used staff on the retained duty system.
- It was noted that WMFS was willing to adopt flexible working and open minded to establishing more effective and efficient shift systems, but analysis had shown the Service would be unable to adopt the retained duty system model and maintain the Service Delivery Model and deliver assertively, safely and effectively the range of services it provides to support communities.
- Additionally, the risk based attendance standard (five minute response time for category one incidents) cannot be supported by a retained duty system.

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Management of the Fire and Rescue sector

- The review considered governance, multi-tier entry, and the potential for collaboration and mergers, asking if some fire services were large enough to remain sustainable.
- The review recognised the differing levels of complexity of different services, ranking WMFS second only to London Fire Brigade in terms of management of complexity.

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

- With regard to the statistics on bullying and harassment, the review provided no comparison with other sectors. Indeed, the report provided very little detail to support the claims made regarding the figures of bullying and harassment.
- A key factor was the 'perception' of bullying and harassment; 'perceived' was not necessarily in line with the legal definition of bullying and harassment. It was noted that the legal definition was quite narrow, and that it was not uncommon for employees to claim they were bullied / harassed when in fact this was not the case legally.
- A significant period of time had passed since the review was launched and eventually published, and the sector had moved on in that time. In many ways the report was out of date. WMFS, as with a lot of services, had gone past what the report says, and had already addressed or implemented many of the areas for improvement / recommendations, or were in the process of doing so.
- The Home Office had not marked the publication of the review with any announcement or press release.
- The Home Office would be taking into account the findings of the review with regard to the implementation of the forthcoming Fire Service Inspectorate. Reports from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Blue Light Work were due to be submitted to the Home Office before the end of the year, and the Home Office would consider the reports and decide which option to take forward. This would start to see what form the Fire Service Inspectorate would take in early 2017.

26/16 Operational Assessment

Karen Gowreesunker, Strategic Enabler Strategic Hub, delivered a presentation on the outcomes of the Operational Assessment and the Fire Peer Challenge:

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SET had received feedback from the Fire Peer Challenge team on the fourth and final day of the peer challenge which had took place in October. The Service had now received the initial draft report from the peer team and SET were currently in the process of providing feedback on the report for consideration by the peer team.

The findings within the initial report included:

Strategic Leadership and Governance

Strengths:

- Strong strategic leadership effective for enabling decisions
- Clear vision, which was bought into by staff
- Future Governance Working Group was ambitious

Areas for consideration:

- Clarity of the Scheme of Delegations
- Enhancing elected Member roles
- Engagement plan around future reform

Local context and priorities

Strengths:

- The wider prevention agenda was embedded within the organisation, across all staff
- WMFS was highly visible in partnership arrangements and considered a valued resource by partners
- The Service was outward facing, supported by delegation to middle managers

Areas for consideration:

- Retention of organisational memory
- Ensuring that our communities and the wider fire sector understood the value of five minute response target
- Combination of regional fire services

Financial strategy

Strengths:

- Strong focus on future funding and long term sustainability
- Budget mechanisms understood
- Track record of delivering savings

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Areas for consideration:

- Budget strategy versus longer term financial planning
- Further understanding of risk associated with income generation

Service delivery

Strengths:

- Integrated service delivery model
- Genuinely focussed on understanding the health agenda
- Frameworks delivering flexibilities and freedoms for operational staff

Areas for consideration:

- A more systematic approach to transformational change
- Clarity of interdependencies across the organisation
- The Service to tell 'its story' more

Fire Control

Strengths:

- Impressive leadership
- Overcome significant challenges
- Staff recognised recently developed vision and their involvement

Areas for consideration:

- Lessons learnt for future
- Aligning mobilisation protocols
- Innovation in resilience of service fall back arrangements

Training and development

Strengths:

- The Service recognised the importance of training
- High levels of confidence around professional assurance
- Clear personal ownership of training responsibilities

Areas for consideration:

- Further training – part of Telecare service
- Succession planning and talent management
- Consider ability to maintain optimum crewing levels against need for training

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Equality and diversity

Strengths:

- Open and transparent – the Service challenges and opens itself up to external scrutiny
- The Service understand positive action
- Equality forum leads are a great asset

Areas for consideration:

- Resource allocation for positive action and other DICE activities
- Develop a long term strategy for having a representative workforce
- Analysis of data from recruitment programmes

The next steps in the process:

- The Service to feedback to the Local Government Association around areas identified and the report to be finalised by the peer team
- The Service to publish the report in full
- An improvement plan to be scrutinised through the Fire Authority

The meeting closed at 11:45 hours.

<p>Contact Officer: Stephen Timmington Strategic Hub West Midlands Fire Service 0121 380 6680</p>
