

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

**19 September 2016 at 11.00 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

Present: Councillor Edwards (Chair)
Councillor Idrees (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Allcock, Aston, Singh Atwal,
Bennett, Booth, Brackenridge,
Cartwright, Clinton, Davis,
Eustace, Hogarth, Idrees,
Sealey, B Singh, P Singh, T Singh, Skinner,
Spence, Tranter, Walsh and Young.

Apologies: Councillor Barrie, Barlow, Bennett, Craddock, Dad,
Mottram

Observer: Mr Ager

58/16 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Edwards declared a personal and non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 63/16 below (Monitoring of Finances).

Councillor Brackenridge declared a personal and non-pecuniary interest in Minute No.63/16 (Monitoring of Finances).

59/16 Chair's Announcements

The Chair informed the Authority of the recent resignation of the Monitoring Officer, Melanie Dudley, from Sandwell MBC. Deputy Monitoring Officer, Satinder Sahota would be acting as Monitoring Officer in the meantime and a further report would be presented regarding a review of the arrangements at or before the 2017 Annual General Meeting.

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Members were reminded to complete their CMIS forms and Skills Grids and return them to Julie Connor as soon as possible.

The Chief Fire Officer informed the Authority of the recent announcement that the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority had made its debut in the Inclusive Top 50 UK Employers List realising 31st place. A flyer was circulated to Members explaining that the list spotlights organisations that promote inclusion across all protected characteristics such as age, disability, race, faith or sexual orientation with a focus on representation at management, senior, executive and board level. The award represents the Authority's commitment to the overarching Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE) strategy and the outcomes being achieved. The Chief Fire Officer stated his delighted with the placing and felt that it indicated the progress that the Authority were making in respect of DICE.

Members were informed that the Authority had also become Members of Stonewall following an equality assessment and a good direction of travel was being made.

In answer to a Member's question in respect of the progress being made for baptised Sikhs to join the Service, the Strategic Enabler (People Support Services) confirmed that the Service was engaging with under-represented groups to overcome the barriers faced by Sikhs wishing to join the Service. The Service were currently recruiting and would use this opportunity to engage with members of the Sikh community and use this feedback to evaluate the barriers.

The Chief Fire Officer informed the Authority that the Sikh Channel had held an open day at Fire Service Headquarters where the health and safety issues of Sikh men wearing turbans and beards had been discussed in relation to the wearing of breathing apparatus.

Councillor Atwal Singh informed the Authority that he had been involved with discussions on this issue, particularly in respect of construction sites and offered to help with his contacts at the Sikh Council UK and their expertise in this area nationally.

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The Chair felt the achievement of being included on the List was remarkable and indicated the achievements made in this area and gave recognition to the Authority being a serious player in this area. The Authority thanked the Strategic Enabler (PSS) for the work that had been carried out.

60/16 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2016, be confirmed as a correct record.

61/16 **Audit Findings**

The Authority noted the Audit Findings Report (AFR) 2015/16 from Grant Thornton. The AFR is designed to support the Auditor's opinions and conclusions and is a requirement of the Code of Audit Practice. The report had been presented to the Audit Committee on 25 July 2016 for approval. Following this meeting the Auditors were able to provide an unqualified opinion on the Authority's 2015/16 financial statements included in the Authority's Statement of Accounts and Value for Money.

The key audit and financial reporting issues were set out in the AFR but no adjustments were required. The Auditor stated that Officers had provided a sound set of accounts and the accounts had been prepared early allowing the External Audit Opinion to be signed early at the end of July. The Authority were now in a strong position to bring forward the accounts in 2016/17 as this was expected of all of local government.

The Auditor was also required to provide a value for money conclusion. In carrying out this work, the auditor is required to follow the National Audit Office's Auditor Guidance Note 3 (AGN 03). The Auditor concluded that for 2015/16 the Authority had proper arrangements in all significant respects to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness and to ensure it delivered value for money in its use of resources.

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The Auditor stated that the Authority is in a reasonably strong financial position and the assumptions indicate that it will be able to carry on with the level of current performance despite the financial challenges it faces. It was recommended that the Authority should continue to work with partner organisations and to “tell its story” and this will ensure that the Authority are doing the right thing in respect of Value for Money to the community.

The Auditor thanked the officers for their work in respect of the accounts and the Audit Committee for their scrutiny of the papers at the end of July.

The Chair thanked the Auditor and the team who deliver against the Plan to enable such a good new report and the Authority were pleased to receive a clean bill of health whilst having the best response time to Category 1 incidents.

62/16 **Statement of Accounts**

The Authority noted the Statement of Accounts 2015/16 and summary of the Statement of Accounts. The Treasurer confirmed that the Statement of Accounts had been reviewed by the Audit Committee and who had also met in a separate workshop to discuss the accounts in detail. The Audit Committee appreciated the work that had been undertaken on the accounts.

The Treasurer stated that there had been a modest movement in the last financial year of the general fund balances of £0.002 million leaving £9.233 million.

Earmarked reserves had moved upwards by £3,899m from £36.266m to £40.165m. This was due to capital related initiatives in ICT, staffing arrangements and initiatives to support the Combined Authority. A summary list of earmarked reserves was set out in the Statement of Accounts.

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The Treasurer referred to the Authority not undertaking long term borrowing during 2015/16. The closing figure of £38,627k had reduced from the previous year. The Treasurer advised the Authority that the long term loans had supported capital investment and the Authority had £154m in long term assets shown on the Balance Sheet. Long term borrowing was continuing in a downward path.

The Chair reiterated that earmarked reserves were reasonably substantial, but the Authority would be using its earmarked reserves for the replacement of Coventry and Aston Fire Stations and the reserves will be committed to capital projects for the next four years and no further capital resources would be received from the Government.

In response to a Member's enquiry, the Treasurer confirmed the loans associated with Dudley MBC are a residue from the old West Midlands County Council and each Metropolitan District Council has a proportion of the debt. The Public Works Loan Board provided the remainder of the long term loans. The interest rates on the loans is higher than current interest rates, and so a 'premium charge' would be incurred if the Authority wished to repay any of the loans early.

63/16 **Monitoring of Finances**

The Authority noted the Monitoring of Finances. Appendix A showed the current position of the Revenue Budget and a favourable variance of £0.110m at this part of the financial year. There was currently an overspend of £164,000 that related to the Voluntary Additional Shifts under the new staffing model, this would be monitored closely as the system becomes embedded. Appendix B of the report set out the position in respect of the Firefighters' Pension Schemes and Appendix C indicated the current Capital Budget spend to August of £828,000. The forecast spend of £7.9m is in line with the total budget. The Coventry and Aston Schemes together with the Vehicle Replacement Programme account for £5.6m of the total expenditure.

64/16 **Contracts Awards Summary for Period to 31 August 2016**

The Authority noted the Appendix to the report which provided a six monthly summary of all contracts in excess of £250,000 that had been awarded since March 2016.

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It was noted that the contract for Hi-Viz Jackets relates to a Framework contract for other UK Fire and Rescue Services.

65/16 **West Midlands Fire Service Fleet Availability**

The Authority noted the report from the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) setting out:

- the policy changes creating an impact on the Ridership factor leading to pressures on the Staffing Model;
- the West Midlands Fire Service's fleet availability within the Service Delivery Model;
- the delegations to the Chief Fire Officer relating to resource deployment.

The report informed Members of the Service Delivery Model and the day to day work of the Fire Service. It was explained that each Fire Authority have a duty to identify and assess risk and in the West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) this is achieved and set out in the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), the Community Safety Strategy (CSS), The Plan and the Statement of Assurance.

WMFS have used the academic research into survivability and have included this in its Vision Statement to make the WMFS Safer, Stronger and Healthier. This is achieved through the Service Delivery Model (SDM) and an integrated approach through the core functions of Prevention, Protection and Response.

The SDM is currently delivered through a fleet of 41 fire appliances, 19 Brigade Response Vehicles (BRVs) and 3 Business Support Vehicles (BSVs) strategically located at 38 community fire stations with whole-time firefighters

Emergency incidents are categorised into five areas. Category 1 (High Risk) current has a risk based attendance standard of 5 minutes and this provides the best chance of survivability. The Corporate Performance Indicator 1, currently indicates an average attendance of 4.40 minutes to this category and is the best response time in the country.

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The reduction in core funding of £10m over the next four years has resulted in the need for the Service to develop alternative approaches. This has seen changes to shift patterns, the introduction of flexible crewing and Prevention, Protection and Response (PPR) being delivered in an integrated manner. 277 post have been lost and the establishment has fallen below the 1322 optimum crewing required. The new staffing model uses a ridership factor to calculate how many operational personnel the Service need to employ to maintain emergency cover for resources. The ridership factor considers a wide range of factors that will reduce staff availability to ride appliances such as leave and sickness and policy decisions such as Maternity/Paternity leave and flexible working.

The whole-time SDM ensures the greatest level of fleet availability and improved availability of personnel to deliver PPF activities and to develop a highly trained workforce to deliver excellence to the communities of the West Midlands. The number of resources can fluctuate due to routine vehicle maintenance, shift patterns, off shift training, staff sickness and operational commitment.

A new system of maximised response has been designed to support the SDM and will be implemented by January 2017 and is complemented by the Distributed Training Model (DTM). The Service have been able to improve fleet availability to 95% and decrease attendance times.

The Service are developing the Dynamic Cover Tool (DCT) to more effectively manage resources. The DCT analyses and models 150,000 historical incidents to support the decision making by Fire Control. The DCT will be implemented during the Autumn of 2016.

One Member commented on the repetition of reports and felt that Members had already received the information at the Policy Planning Forum (PPF), where an open debate was held. He felt this was a regular occurrence but was aware that some of the newer Members of the Authority were not as informed as some of the more long standing members of the Authority, however, he felt it was a good report.

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The Chair stated that the Fire Authority via the Scrutiny Committee receive regular performance related reports and welcome the information and celebrate the achievements by the WMFS in having the lowest response times in the country. It was also stated that the reports come to the Fire Authority as they are public meetings, unlike PPF, and are therefore informing a wider readership and assuring the public. The Chair felt that the good news should be placed on record in the form of a Press Release.

In response to another question that had come up at a recent Scrutiny Committee, it was confirmed that although a different response, if a person was in difficulty in water, the response would be a similar to a category 1 high risk incident. It was confirmed that the information would be brought back to the next Scrutiny Committee.

Another Member felt that the positive direction of travel both in relation to attendance times and fleet availability should be shared with the public and congratulated the Chief Fire Officer on the performance.

One Member stated that he had secured an appointment with Brandon Lewis, MP, Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service, and asked if the Authority wished to raise anything with him. The CFO confirmed he would be happy to brief the Councillor on the latest position in respect of sprinklers.

The Chair stated the Authority had formally invited the Minister and would be pleased to see the Minister in the Brigade.

The CFO agreed to ensure that all information is presented to the Authority in a concise way. He stated that information that was shared at Policy Planning Forum's was to enable Members to understand the complex nature of the Service Delivery Model and to be able to take the information back to their individual Councils to justify the Model and the community it serves. The purpose was to use this as a reference point for the members and to maximise the Service's impact as it moves towards the Combined Authority. The CFO informed the Authority that he had been meeting with Chief Executives of the Metropolitan District Councils.

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66/16 **Efficiency Plan 2016/2020**

The Authority received a report seeking comments and consideration of the proposed Efficiency Plan 2016/2020 due for submission by 14 October 2016.

Members considered the response that set out how the Authority planned to achieve the £10m deficit in its budget. This was the Authority's response to the Home Office request for firm efficiency plans in return for a four year funding settlement.

The Chair stated that the report set out how the Authority would now be using its reserves as it would not be receiving any capital funding. The report also set out how the Authority would be using Voluntary Additional Shifts as a flexible approach to staffing to enable efficiencies to be made and maintain the Service Delivery Model. The Chair hoped that the government would accept the efficiency plan and core funding would then be provided up to 2020 in line with the provisional settlement.

In response to a Member's enquiry, the Treasurer stated that the Authority would start to have a better sense of the long term economic outlook following Brexit when the Chancellor of the Exchequer presents the Autumn Statement. The Treasurer stated that that cuts may be deeper or longer, but in applying for a four year settlement provides the Authority potentially with more certainty up to 2020.

It was noted that the Home Office had requested the Efficiency Plans before the Brexit vote. The potential move to Business Rates Retention and the Authority's involvement in the Combined Authority could also have an impact.

67/16 **100% Business Rates Retention**

The Authority noted a report on the proposed response to question 13 of the Government's 100% business rates retention consultation exercise.

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The report brought the Authority's attention to the first consultation exercise in relation to the proposed introduction of a 100% business rate retention funding model for local government.

The Fire Service had been transferred from the Department of Communities and Local Government to the Home Office and this had prompted the question of funding for the Fire Service and if it should be funded in a similar way to the Police.

It was felt that the Authority had a strong role to play in local government e.g. with its "Keeping Business in Business" work, the road networks and the Combined Authority. The report indicated that the Authority wished to be part of the business rate retention scheme with local authorities rather than being left to direct Home Office funding. More details of this form of funding would become available in the future.

It was noted that if there was a downturn in the economy, there would be a reduction in receipts from business rates, but the system would have safety measures to dampen this effect.

The Chair stated that a downturn in the economy would bring central government funding cutbacks as well and it was confirmed that the document reflected the Authority's position at the current time and would be returned on behalf of the Authority.

68/16 **Minutes of the Audit Committee**

The minutes of the Audit Committee held on 25 July 2016 were received.

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69/16 **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 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 information relating to any action taken, or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution or crime).

70/16 **Planned Procurement Exercise for 2016/17**

The Authority received a report that provided the rationale for the planned tender exercises for the provision of smoke alarms to West Midlands Fire Service and included the proposed route to market and funding provision as per Standing Order 1/8.

Resolved that the tender exercise for the provision of smoke alarms to West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority during 2016/17 be approved.

(The meeting ended at 1230 hours)

<p>Contact Officer: Julie Connor Strategic Hub West Midlands Fire Service 0121 380 6906</p>
