

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**6 February 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, Bennett,
Booth, Cartwright, Clinton, Craddock, Dad, Davis, Eustace,
Hogarth, Mottram, Sealey, B Singh, P Singh, T Singh, Skinner,
Spence 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),
A Afsar, J Connor, J Danbury, M Hamilton-Russell, N Spencer,
S Timmington, and S Vincent

Clerk and Monitoring Officer

K Gowreesunker (Clerk)
S Sahota (Monitoring Officer)

Apologies: Councillors: Brackenridge, Walsh and Young
Mr Ager

Observers: Nil

4/17 Chair and CFO Announcements

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

Proposals for falls response services continued to be developed with Local Authorities. A trial with Dudley Council was to commence shortly (with a provision of an 'out of hours' service).

Brandon Lewis, Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service, would be giving a speech on fire sector reform at an event held by the think tank Reform on 7 February 2017.

A charity football match between WMFS Headquarters and Police veterans was due to take place at Tally Ho on 9 February.

Policy Planning Forum 6 February 2017

A long service and good conduct ceremony would be taking place on the evening of 22 February.

The clothing appeal at Ladywood would be extended to Highgate, with an aim to expand further where possible.

5/17 The Budget

Mike Griffiths, Strategic Enabler of Finance and Resources, delivered a presentation on the Budget:

Core funding will decrease by approximately £10 million from 2016/17 to 2019/20.

The five key areas to meet the £10 million deficit remained:

- Increase to Council Tax and Business Rate Distribution: £2M
- General budget reductions: £1M
- Internal restructures: £1M
- Commissioning: £2M
- Staffing: £4M

Proposals to increase council tax by 1.99% in 2017/18 would equate to a cost of £56.03 per year for a Band D property, an increase of £1.11 per year. In the event of the proposed increase being accepted, the amount would continue to represent the lowest council tax charge for a Fire and Rescue Service.

Good progress had been made with regard to commissioning. It was noted that the target of £2M was achievable but it would be challenging.

The target of £4M savings to be made via staffing remained appropriate. It was also noted that payment of the disturbance allowance had been extended to December 2017 (previously due to finish at the end of March 2017), which would result in increased cost pressures in 2017/18.

It was noted that there were a number of budget pressures which Members should be aware of. These were as a result of a variety of issues including the historically low interest rates impacting on balances, forthcoming changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme, changes to rental income derived from the Service's estate, and potential issues arising from the staffing model (as outlined above).

Members were informed that it was proposed that £600k would be utilised from the general balances. General balances were currently approximately £9.2M and therefore would decrease to £8.6M if the proposal was to be accepted. It was noted that general balances

Policy Planning Forum 6 February 2017

should be used for one off and service reform issues, and that staffing was an issue that fell within this area.

The Capital Programme over the next three years remained in balance and it was noted that the amount for year 2017/18 was quite high, mainly due to re-developments of the Aston and Coventry Fire Stations. However, Members were informed that 2020/21 onwards currently presented a challenge. No specific direct capital funding being made available for Fire and Rescue Services. This was an issue for the fire sector as a whole to challenge.

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

- The total expenditure of the Authority of approximately £95 million in 2017/18 was made up of approximately £55 million core funding and £40 million council tax precept.
- The Government had announced a proposal to localise 100% business rates and a resulting consultation asked whether Fire and Rescue Services should be included within a local business rate retention scheme, or remain funded centrally. However, the outcome would not be known for some time yet.

6/17 The Plan

Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Authority and Strategic Enabler of the Strategic Hub delivered a presentation and The Plan 2017-20:

The Plan was the Service's three year rolling corporate strategy. The Service sought approval of The Plan on an annual basis although this did not mean that The Plan did not evolve over the course of the year.

The priorities and outcomes had been reviewed, resulting in the outcomes being refreshed.

Influences in the review of The Plan included the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), outcomes of the public consultation on the IRMP, and external changes:

- The IRMP identified that the Service Delivery Model remains fit for purpose.
- The public consultation informed the Service that:
 - 91% of the community and partners (who responded) understood and agreed that our Prevention, Protection and Response work will make the communities and businesses of the West Midlands safer, stronger and healthier

Policy Planning Forum 6 February 2017

- 96% of the communities and partners (who responded) agreed that the Service should continue to protect the five minute risk based attendance standard
- A changing external environment including the West Midlands Combined Authority and devolution, the Home Office expectations for reform, duty to collaborate, continued funding cuts, etc

The core priorities within The Plan of prevention, protection and response remained the same. The respective outcomes had been refined so that they were more focussed and aligned to the work with Local Authorities and the NHS, the focus on vulnerability, and the five minute attendance standard.

The outcomes within the 'Effective Delivery through Collaboration' had been refined to reflect:

- A focus on greater and better use of ICT
- Clearer on behaviours and the commitment to positive action
- Clarity on flexible funding

It was noted that the next steps would involve the approval of the priorities and outcomes within The Plan at the Fire Authority meeting on 20 February, the approval of performance targets at the Executive Committee scheduled on 27 March, followed by the launch of The Plan 2017-20 on 1 April.

7/17 Future Governance

Cllr John Edwards, Chair of WMFRA, delivered a presentation and update on the subject of future governance:

A report detailing the outcomes of the Future Governance Working Group would be presented at the Fire Authority meeting on 20 February, along with reports on the outcomes of the Integrated Risk Management Plan Public Consultation, and a Route Map to a West Midlands Combined Authority Mayoral Governance.

Emerging changes:

- The Policing and Crime Act had received royal assent. As a result, Police and Crime Commissioners were now able to put forward business cases regarding the governance of fire and rescue services.
- Devolution 2 was currently being considered and developed by the various stakeholders involved in the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). It was noted that there was a need for WMFS to figure in the Devolution 2 agreement which

Policy Planning Forum 6 February 2017

would allow a route through to the WMCA (currently exists via the Policing and Crime Act).

- The mayoral elections would take place on 4 May 2017.
- Finances and business rates, including the proposed business rates retention from 2020 onwards.

Proposals:

- To seek inclusion in the WMCA's devolution 2 deal, to enable an affective route for future governance through a Mayor at the earliest opportunity.
- This would offer the best route to:
 - Maintain the delivery of the strategic direction and services
 - Further collaboration across the region
 - Enable increased collaboration (duty) across wider public services
 - The achievement of cross sector priorities (multiple complex needs, public sector reform)

Timeline:

- Commencing initially on 20 February 2017 with the seeking of approval of the Fire Authority on the future route for future governance of WMFS including intent to reform the Fire Authority
- Report to be submitted to and considered at the WMCA meeting on 3 March 2017
- Governance review, consultation and scheme July to October 2017
- Further discussions with Government and the drafting of an Order to enable transfer in governance to take place November 2017 to March 2018

Note: the timeline above demonstrates the earliest opportunity for change

Continuing reformation:

- A reformed Fire Authority option can provide:
 - A more robust, streamlined and flexible interim approach to governance
 - An arrangement to Mayoral and possible future Combined options

Policy Planning Forum 6 February 2017

- A reformed Fire Authority would:
 - Maintain proportionality across the West Midlands
 - Reflect changing approaches to governance
 - Include invitations for non-executive membership to enhance collaboration, scrutiny, accountability and transparency to improve outcomes for the community

It was intended that a smaller reformed Fire Authority would maintain Local Authority proportional representation and the section 41 principle.

Timeline for a reformed Fire Authority:

- 20 February 2017 - recommendation submitted to the Fire Authority for consideration and approval
- 3 March 2017 – report seeking approval of Mayoral route including reformed Fire Authority submitted to WMCA for consideration
- Consultation – with the West Midlands Metropolitan Leaders, elected Mayor and the Home Office. It is envisaged that the public consultation would last for up to eight weeks
- Secretary of State to make order – on conclusion of the consultation, the matter will proceed to Government who will draft the Order based on the above
- Reform to take effect – at the earliest possible time and in line with Mayoral milestones

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

- It was highly likely that changes to the Fire Authority / governance arrangements would take place during 2018 and within the timescales outlined (as above)
- There was a distinct possibility that there will an expectation from the Government for the Mayor and Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) roles to come together at some point in the future
- One of the conclusions of the Future Governance Working Group was that there was little merit to changing governance structures twice, for example, WMFS moving under the PCC only to then move under the Mayor
- Devolution 2 was not due until after the Mayoral elections. However, the Department of Communities and Local Government had opened up the discussion with the WMCA on Devolution 2, and the width and breadth of items / subjects for consideration had increased.
- A press release would be issued following the Fire Authority meeting on 20 February

Policy Planning Forum 6 February 2017

8/17 Strategic Enabling Team Review

Phil Hales, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, delivered a presentation on the review of the Strategic Enabling Team (SET):

SET was created following the move away from the Corporate Board. SET is structured in such a way that allows members of the team to make decisions, which are then put to the Chief Fire Officer who is the final arbiter.

SET had been reviewed since its creation and was constantly evaluated by the Chief Fire Officer, who had commissioned members of SET to reflect on the progress made over the last 12 months, both in terms of what had gone well, and what could be improved.

Evidence used within the review included delivery against The Plan, SET development, zero based budgeting, Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge, Investors in People, external auditors and Organisational Assurance (internal).

The review had recognised SET's continual strive to develop, improve and achieve excellence.

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

- The Service utilised social media as a communication tool (accounting for a large part of its communication strategy), with many officers and staff having Twitter accounts. The Service Facebook page generated a lot of interaction and had gathered a large number of followers.
- The Service used to have a strict social media policy which had subsequently been relaxed to an extent, reflecting the change in culture and the wish to empower staff.
- It was confirmed that the Service provided safety advice regarding the risks and dangers of carbon monoxide (CO). CO advice was included within Safe and Well visits and crews were equipped with CO detecting equipment if required. Additionally, CO detectors had been issued by the Service as part of a Government initiative following the recent change in legislation, where free detectors had been provided to risk groups. These were originally aimed at people who used log burners, etc, however this didn't fit the profile of the West Midlands, and the Service issued detectors to social landlords.
- It was agreed that a joint press release regarding CO would be drafted and distributed to Members, which would include information on how individuals could be entitled to a free CO detector.

**Policy Planning Forum
6 February 2017**

The meeting closed at 12:33 hours.

Contact Officer: Stephen Timmington
Strategic Hub
West Midlands Fire Service
0121 380 6680