

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**09 November 2015 at 10.30 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

- Present:** **Members of the Authority**
Councillor Edwards (Chair);
Councillor Idrees (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Afzal, Aston, Atwal Singh, Barlow,
Barrie, Craddock, Davis, Dehar, Eustace, Hogarth,
Mottram JP, Quinnen, Shackleton, B Singh, P Singh,
T Singh, Skinner, Spence, Tranter and Young.
Mr Ager.
- Officers:** **West Midlands Fire Service**
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach)
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales);
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor);
M Griffiths, M Hamilton-Russell, S Shilton, S Timmington
and S Vincent.
- Clerk and Monitoring Officer**
K Gowreesunker (Clerk)
M Dudley (Monitoring Officer)
S Sahota (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
- Apologies:** Councillors Clinton, Douglas-Maul, Miks, Sealey and
Ward;
Mr Bell.
- Observers:** A Afsar

20/15 **Chair and CFO's Announcements**

The Chief Fire Officer welcomed all attendees to the Policy Planning Forum on behalf of the Chair.

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The Chief Fire Officer noted that as the Service and the Authority plan for and manage, the strategic plan and service delivery model, the Policy Planning Forum is the correct forum for questions and discussions regarding the service delivery model.

Presentations to the Forum

The following presentations were given to the Policy Planning Forum:

- Verbal update on Estates development
- Every Second Counts video
- Blended Fleet Review
- Operational Excellence video
- Staffing

Note: the two videos were presented either side of the blended fleet review.

21/15 Verbal update on Estates development

Phil Hales, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, provided a verbal update on the Estates development, specifically the redevelopment of Aston, Coventry and Wednesbury Fire Stations.

- Aston

Aston Fire Station is WMFS' oldest building and is listed which has presented the Service with some challenges.

Aston has been confirmed as in a good location for a Fire Station, in accordance with the Service's Integrated Risk Management Plan.

An opportunity had existed to purchase and develop land close to the existing station which could overcome some of the challenges of redeveloping a listed building. However, this is no longer an option because the land has been sold.

The Service are working with the Ambulance and potentially the Police with regard to the new station and partnership working. Architects are currently working on plans to build the new station around the existing building as it is not possible to demolish it. All appliances and operational

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staff will be situated on the ground floor, supporting the 5 minute response standard. The other floors will incorporate community rooms and the fire heritage museum which is stored at the current Aston station (the Service is currently liaising with the Police regarding a shared heritage facility). All buildings that are not listed will be demolished.

The plans for the new station will be agreed with the architects, working with staff, and proposals will be presented to the Fire Authority.

A member asked what the timescales were for the rebuild.

Phil Hales confirmed timescales would be a minimum of 18 months.

- Coventry

Coventry has been confirmed as a good location for a Fire Station, in accordance with the Service's Integrated Risk Management Plan.

A number of options have been considered, including the complete demolition of the site and it has been agreed that the existing fire training building is to be incorporated into the new plans.

The Service is working with partners, including the Ambulance and Age UK.

Members of staff have met with the architects, and are liaising with staff based at the station. A meeting with the council planners is scheduled for week commencing 9 November.

Timescales for completion of the project are 18 months to 2 years. Draft plans will be presented to the Fire Authority in due course. As per the build of Haden Cross Fire Station, consultation will be undertaken with the community. An element of social value is being included the contract.

A member asked if plans included council staff as per previous options.

Phil Hales confirmed that council staff were being included within plans, and the fact that there are a number of agencies on the site has presented challenges including around the relocation of firefighters. The Service is working with local authorities and other agencies to address these challenges.

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A member asked if the other 3 fire stations in the Coventry area were not big enough to accommodate the firefighters and appliances from Coventry Fire Station.

Phil Hales confirmed that there was the potential to utilise the other stations, with a number of options such as relocating the hydraulic platform to such a station during the build.

- Wednesbury

The Service has a water rescue capability at 2 sites; Bickenhill and Wednesbury. However, the Wednesbury site is currently not large enough to accommodate that capability, although it has been confirmed as a good location, supporting the service delivery model in accordance with the Service's Integrated Risk Management Plan.

There are 3 options under consideration; all 3 options are for a combined centre enabling a multi-agency approach:

- A combined centre at a new location
- A combined centre at the existing site
- A combined centre covering two sites

The Service is fully engaged with the NHS and Sandwell MBC, and an informal agreement has been reached between the different agencies to progress this project.

The project could potentially be a considerable capital investment but would be an innovative and unique approach to how services are delivered.

22/15 **Seconds Do Count Video**

Gary Taylor, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the final draft of the 'Every Second Counts' video, which included the latest (quarter 2 2015/16) response time of 4 minutes 42 seconds for category 1 incidents.

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The prime audience for the video is internal but it will be shared externally via social media. One of the aims of the video is to thank staff for the high levels of performance delivered, not just frontline staff, but also service support staff.

A member noted that a time of 4 minutes 42 seconds is brilliant, but once a crew arrives, how long would it take for them to get to work.

Gary Taylor confirmed that WMFS advocates safe, assertive and effective firefighting. 8 members of staff are mobilised, at a minimum of 5 on a Pump Rescue Ladder, and 3 on a Brigade Response Vehicle, providing the resources (Breathing Apparatus / water) required to effectively save lives at category 1 incidents. The strength of the WMFS service delivery model is that not only can crews respond and be in attendance as soon as any fire crew in the UK, but crews also implement assertive firefighting upon arrival, which is backed up by training.

23/15 Blended Fleet Review

Gary Taylor, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, introduced a presentation on the Blended Fleet Review.

The review has been commissioned to evaluate the current fleet and the requirements of the service delivery model and the Service in the future. The introduction of Brigade Response Vehicles has diversified the fleet.

Phase 1 will include the examination and confirmation of fleet type, location, daily use, running costs, life expectancy, and value to the service delivery model.

WMFS' fleet is currently comprised of:

- 41 Pump Rescue Ladders (PRLs): consists of a crew of 5, attend high risk incidents
- 19 Brigade Response Vehicles (BRVs): crew of 3, attend low risk incidents, protect PRL's
- 4 Hydraulic Platforms: located at Coventry, Highgate, Oldbury and Walsall. Generally used as a water tower and for rescues from height
- 3 Business Support Vehicles (BSV's): located at Birmingham, Black

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Country and Coventry. Introduced this year as part of a trial providing fire safety advice at point of contact where alarms are actuating.

- 69 Brigade Vans: 1 located on each station plus a number of others spread across the Service area. Vans used to be used for a variety of roles but those roles, and the numbers of staff, no longer exist.

A visioning exercise is to be carried out, reflecting:

- the Integrated Risk Management Plan,
- prevention, protection and response (it is more efficient to carry out prevention work using a crew of 3 whilst still providing cover),
- commissioning work (accounts for £2 million of the predicted shortfall in funding and the Service's model may change as a result),
- the vehicle replacement programme (money has been allocated for this but it is a review rather than replacement of vehicles and any savings realized may need to be re-invested in replacements),
- research and development (including equipment)

The visioning exercise will culminate in future options for consideration, taking the above into account.

Many Fire and Rescue Services across the country are examining their fleet and exploring alternatives. Previously, WMFS had been ahead of the curve to a certain extent with the development of the Brigade Response Vehicles (being one of the first services to investigate such an appliance).

The presentation illustrated a number of vehicles that had been introduced by other Fire Services including a UNIMOG and Tactical Response Vehicle at Staffordshire FRS, a co-responding vehicle at Devon & Somerset FRS, and a vehicle which is crewed by a Fire Officer, a Police Officer, and a Paramedic, as part of the Community Risk Intervention Team at Greater Manchester FRS.

Reference was made to the Fire Bike which is mainly used for road safety. However, there could be an opportunity to potentially utilise such a vehicle, for example in a Fire Safety / Business Support Vehicle role.

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The following points were raised in discussion prompted by the presentation:

- There is a rolling programme in place for vehicles; as vehicles come to being no longer fit for purpose, they are taken off the fleet and moved into the reserves and then sold off if possible.
- 'Special' appliances will be included within the Blended Fleet Review but there is a focus on prevention and response work to ensure project does not become too broad.
- The Service is examining a more relaxed approach to donning personal protective equipment (PPE) en-route; members of staff have indicated a desire for more guidance, rather than rules. It is not possible to don PPE en-route in a BRV due the size of the vehicles and this does cause a slight delay in responding to an incident.
- WMFS is aware of the Community Risk Intervention Team approach taken by Greater Manchester FRS and is monitoring feedback received. The Service would like to integrate more with other agencies / partners.

24/15

Operational Excellence video

Gary Taylor, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented a video entitled 'Operational Excellence' which provided an overview of the large incident that occurred in the Shard End area in October which saw 19 people being rescued / lead to safety. The video provided an overview of the inter-agency work at the incident with a commentary provided by staff who attended, detailing what they had encountered upon arrival.

Gary Taylor stated that the Service has well rehearsed and well practiced policy and procedures which can be implemented at such an incident.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that part of the Service's strategy included the protection of its estate, which is integral to the Service and supports the service delivery model.

The Chief Fire Officer referenced the previous question which had been raised regarding how long it took for a crew to get to work upon arrival at

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an incident. It takes approximately 90 seconds for a crew to get to work upon arrival at an incident. However, a lot of work goes into achieving this including research and development into equipment, a dynamic risk assessment at the incident, and a systematic risk assessment prior to this. There have been several cases recently where Fire Officers have had to defend themselves regarding charges of corporate manslaughter. To fully understand the question, there is a need to fully understand the role of a firefighter. The number of incidents may be going down, but incidents are becoming more complex and risky.

With regard to BRV's; they do not respond to incidents as fast as a PRL. However, a BRV is not a PRL; it is a great resource to mobilise to category 2, 3 and 4 incidents. It is also a cost effective resource.

25/15

Staffing

The Chief Fire Officer, joined by the Chair, provided an update on staffing.

The majority of the WMFS budget is taken up by staffing. WMFS can no longer afford the 1322 firefighters required to provide the service delivery model.

There are a number of options to cover the budget deficit such as commissioning, internal restructures, with staffing representing the largest element of savings.

The staffing proposals are the only way to provide the service to the community and to maintain the number of appliances and stations.

The proposals include:

- A recruitment freeze
- Maintaining the service delivery model using voluntary additional shifts
- Maintaining the 2-2-4 shift system (note, if a station wishes to collectively adopt a more flexible staffing model, this can be investigated)

The additional shifts have commenced with a small number having been undertaken up to date. Additionally, integrated resilience has been

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formulated, with the opportunity for non-operational grey book staff to carry out additional shifts on stations. This approach allows the service delivery model to be maintained.

The following points were raised in discussion prompted by the update:

- A crew of 4 is used in other Fire Service's but they usually implement defensive tactics. For example, 8 people are required to enter a building at a property fire, with a minimum of 5 to start. With a crew of 4, rapid deployment would need to be implemented which is the riskiest procedure to follow. Additionally, the FBU strongly advocate a crew of 5.
- The WMFS budget has already been reduced by £28 million, a challenge which the Service has met with via a number of initiatives including the introduction of BRV's and the merger of the WMFS and Staffordshire FRS Fire Controls to achieve these savings. However, a further £14 million needs to be saved and this is very difficult. Some of the easiest decisions have already been made previously. Officers are planning on how the service delivery model is protected. The Authority needs to consider how this can be done, or if it is prepared to change the service delivery model and accept slower response times.
- The option put forward by Officers of the use of additional shifts makes the significant savings that are required whilst protecting the existing service delivery model.
- The additional shifts are a purely voluntary process. People do not have to carry out these shifts but can do if they wish. There will be no impact upon members of staff who do not participate.
- Firefighters will know what their shifts are. The 2-2-4 shift system will remain unless stations wish to adopt locally agreed ways of working.
- The FBU nationally have responded to the Comprehensive Spending Review. The response includes a demand that service delivery models are maintained. This is exactly what WMFS are trying to achieve.

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- 378 members of staff have indicated that they would consider volunteering to participate in the additional shifts which would be more than ample. The shifts do not represent a change in terms and conditions. They are purely voluntary and are a means to address the financial deficit the Service is facing. Weekly meetings are held with the representative bodies which allow the opportunity to discuss alternatives.

(Meeting ended at 12:30 am)

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