

Minutes of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

21st April, 2008, at 11.00 am
at the Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham

Present: Councillor Howard (Chairman);
Councillor Ward (Vice-Chairman);
Councillors Alden, Birbeck, S Davis, Douglas-
Maul, Eustace, Gazey, Hinton, Hussain, Idrees,
Jackson, Mulhall, Ryder, Singh, Spence, Tagger
and Turner;
Mr Topliss.

Apologies: Councillors Bowen, G Davies, Foster, Pitt and
Wild.

12/08 **Chairman's Announcements**

Members noted that today was Her Majesty the Queen's birthday.

The Chairman referred to the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter [Minute No. 14/08 below] and indicated that this would be the last meeting attended by Mike McDonagh and Simon Allsop of KPMG as that in accordance with Audit Commission regulations, the company would no longer audit the Authority's accounts after a relationship of 14 years. External audit services would be provided in future by the Audit Commission.

The Chairman further indicated that he had asked for the visioning session for Members due to be held on 9th and 10th May to be deferred until later in the year.

The Chairman thanked Members for the manner in which they had conducted the meetings during the course of the year. He wished those standing for election every success and expressed his appreciation for the contribution of Members during 2007/08. For those not returning to the Authority he similarly wished every success in their future work.

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13/08 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 11th February, 2008 be confirmed as a correct record.

14/08 **Draft Annual Audit and Inspection Letter**

John Gregory of the Audit Commission and Mike McDonagh and Simon Allsop of KPMG attended the meeting to present the draft Annual Audit and Inspection Letter.

Mr Gregory indicated that the Authority had been assessed as 'improving well' in the annual Direction of Travel assessment. The overall service assessment score had declined from 3 to 2 due to variations in a few key performance indicators. Some of these indicators were liable to significant year-on-year fluctuations and the external auditors did not see the decline in the overall assessment as detracting from the overall wider assessment that the Authority was performing well. The main messages for the Authority included the need to develop information on the resource implications of key activities, in particular, the development of key measures for middle management to use in making staffing and operational decisions.

The proposed Authority response to the draft audit and inspection letter was submitted. There had been substantial development and improvement since 2006/07, the year to which this report referred, and it was anticipated that a considerable improvement would be seen in the Authority's scores following the next audit and inspection.

Members were concerned that the report failed to properly recognise their perception of the positive work and contribution the Brigade made to local communities. Matters raised within the report were being addressed by management and considerable progress had been made since the audit took place. Members were keen to ensure recognition was given to the hard work of support staff and firefighters in increasing public

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safety and driving down the number of fires, fire deaths and injuries. They emphasised the strong value for money the Brigade provided.

Mr Gregory responded to these points.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Authority notes the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter;
- (2) that the thanks of the Authority be conveyed to West Midlands Fire Service Officers for the improvements made to the Service as set out in the Annual Audit and Inspection letter, but expresses its disappointment at some of the negative views stated by the Auditors;
- (3) that thanks be conveyed to KPMG for their services as the Authority's external auditors over the last 14 years.

15/08 **Work Programme and Scale of Fees 2008/09 and Indicative Fee Proposals 2009/10 and 2010/11**

Further to Minute No 5/08 of the Executive Committee, the Authority was informed of the outcomes of the national consultation conducted by the Audit Commission with regard to their proposed work programme and fees for the period 2008/09 to 2010/11.

This Authority had raised concerns with regard to the level of the proposed increases in fees and the increased burden that would be placed on Fire and Rescue Authorities with the revised approach to the Use of Resources assessment for 2009.

The Audit Commission had responded to the consultation by amending their work programme and fees proposals. The Use of Resources assessment would not now incur a fee increase and the Audit Commission would contribute towards the data quality assessment in 2008/09. The proposed fee increase had been reduced to 29% phased over three years, with an 11% increase in 2008/09. It was hoped that a proportion of the fees

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would be covered by government grant.

The overall increase in fees in 2008/09 would be approximately £8,000 which could be provided for in the budget process.

Members were still concerned that the fee increases were well in excess of the rate of inflation and that no value for money information had been made available. There were also concerns that these fee increases may impact on service delivery and the precept in future years. The Chairman indicated that this matter was still under discussion at national level and that lobbying would continue with a view to achieving a further reduction in fees if possible.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the changes to the Audit Commission's work programme and scale of fees for 2008/11 be noted;
- (2) that the Audit Committee be asked to monitor the scope and depth of external audit work and to ensure it gives value for money, in accordance with paragraph 1(7) of its terms of reference.

16/08 Institution of Legal Proceedings

The Authority was informed that, after consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, legal proceedings had been instituted in respect of Sports World, 22-24 Park Street Walsall, for failure to comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

17/08 Minutes of the Executive Committee

The minutes of the meetings held on 3rd, 17th and 31st March, 2008, were received.

18/08 Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

The notes of the meetings held on 3rd and 31st March, 2008, were

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received.

19/08 **Minutes of the Audit Committee**

The minutes of the meeting held on 31st March, 2008, were received.

20/08 **Minutes of the Standards Committee**

The minutes of the meetings held on 11th February and 31st March, 2008, were received.

21/08 **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).

22/08 **Award of Contracts for New Fire Service Headquarters**

The Authority considered a report on the evaluation of tenders for various contracts relating to the fit out of the new Fire Service Headquarters.

Tenders relating to the fit out of Equipment Maintenance Services, ICT fitting bays, the railway arches and stores (Contract A), and the fit out of Safeside and offices (Contract B) had been opened on 3rd April, 2008 in the presence of the Vice Chairman following a competitive tender exercise. The tenders for the supply and installation of audio visual equipment (Contract C) had been obtained under paragraph 2.15(e) of the Procurement Standing Orders via the Office of Government Commerce.

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Tenders were received as follows:

Contract A	Contract B	Contract C
£365,146	£667,272	£147,625
£386,187	£690,767	£168,841
£416,613	£737,888	

The tenders in respect of Contract A had been evaluated and both satisfied the tender brief. It was therefore recommended that the lowest tender be accepted.

The second lowest tender received in respect of Contract B was recommended for acceptance on the basis of quality of the submission and the market experience and strength of the tenderer.

The second lowest tender received in respect of Contract C was recommended for acceptance on the basis of the quality of the submission.

There was provision in the budget for the costs of the works.

Members were informed that the new Headquarters project was running to time and it was anticipated that the move to the new premises could commence on 25th July 2008 as scheduled. These three contracts complemented the main fit out contract and the works would be carried out over the next 12 weeks.

Resolved that, subject to the preparation of a formal contract by the Clerk:-

- (1) the tender submitted by CPL Interiors PLC for Contract A, in the sum of £365,146, being the lowest received, be accepted;
- (2) the tender submitted by CPL interiors PLC for Contract B, in the sum of £690,767, being the second lowest received, be accepted; and
- (3) the tender submitted by Computacenter for Contract C, in the sum of £168,841, being the second lowest

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received, be accepted.

23/08 **Vote of thanks**

Members thanked the Chairman for the courteous and professional manner in which he had conducted meetings of the Authority during the current municipal year.

(Meeting ended at 12.04 pm)

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