

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**10 September, 2012 at 10.30 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham**

Present: Members of the Authority

Councillors Aston, Atwal, Auluck, Chambers, Clinton, Davies, Davis, Delaney, Douglas-Maul, Edwards, Eustace, Finnegan, Foster, Hogarth, Idrees, O'Neill, Quinnen, Sealey, Singh, Spence, Tranter, Walsh, Ward, Wright, Yardley and Young.

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service

Assistant Chief Fire Officers D Walton and P Loach (Acting Chief Fire Officer).
M Griffiths and D Johnson.

Clerk and Monitoring Officer

N Sharma and S Hancock.

Apologies: Councillor O'Reilly and Mr Ager.

18/12

Chair's Announcements

The Chair made the following announcements:-

- Recruitment to the post of Deputy Chief Fire Officer was currently on hold. Assistant Chief Fire Officers P Hales and P Loach respectively would be acting up into the role for six months each, after which time the position would be re-evaluated.
- A comprehensive fire sector wide debate had taken place at Westminster on 5 September, 2012. Various Members of Parliament had contributed and reiterated the views regarding future budget cuts.
- Brandon Lewis MP had been appointed as Fire Minister in a Cabinet reshuffle. Mr Lewis had no previous experience with fire and rescue services and meetings would be arranged with him as soon as possible to ensure that he was aware of the issues authorities were facing.

Policy Planning Forum – 10 September, 2012

- Consultation had commenced on the design of the new fire station at Cradley Heath and Halesowen and public meetings/drop in sessions would be held on 12 September at 6pm and 15 September at 9am at Haden Hill Leisure Centre. A report on the matter would be submitted to the Authority on 24 September, 2012.
- Visits to Safeside, the Academy and Fire Control had been arranged for new members on 17 September, 2012. A further visit to Transport Engineering Workshops was also being arranged and members were asked to respond to the Clerk with their availability.
- An induction session for new members would be held after the meeting of the Authority on 24 September, 2012.
- Assistant Chief Fire Officer David Walton had been appointed Assistant Chief Fire Officer at West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service and would be leaving West Midlands in January, 2013. Members congratulated him and wished him well.

19/12

Sprinklers Update

Steve Mills GI Fire E, co-ordinator of the British Automatic Fire Sprinkler Association (Bafra) gave a presentation on the work the association was doing with regards to research, campaign and lobbying for the wider use of sprinklers.

It was reported that the use of timber in construction was rapidly increasing, due to cost-cutting in the building industry. This not only increased the risk of fire spreading quickly but it also increased the likelihood of total loss of the building as a consequence of fire due to its limited structural strength in a fire situation. Even with the use of sprinklers, the risk of total loss was greater as the fire was more likely to spread into roof cavities where sprinklers could not reach. The risk to life was also greater due to more rapid building collapses.

Fire and rescue services continued to actively promote the benefits of sprinklers and it was noted that the Welsh Assembly would be implementing regulations on the use of sprinklers from September 2013. The UK government remained apathetic to the cause however.

Policy Planning Forum – 10 September, 2012

The Chair reported on the work of the LGA Sprinkler Campaign Group, which had been established in November, 2011 to develop a campaign lobby for the wider use of sprinklers in England through legislation or additional regulation. The campaign was focussing on gaining the support of the media and the public by publishing graphic information on fire deaths and the benefits of sprinklers. A toolkit had been developed which was currently being piloted and the final version would be launched at the LGA Fire Conference in March 2013.

20/12

Business Rates Retention

Further to Minute No. 21/11 of the Executive Committee (10 October, 2011) the Director Resources reported that the current proposals with regards to retention of a proportion of business rates by local authorities now included all fire and rescue authorities.

Under the current proposals local authorities would retain 50% of business rates and fire and rescue services would receive 2%, with the rest going to the government. It was recognised that there was some level of volatility in the current economic climate in terms of business growth rates.

A further consultation exercise was currently underway which was looking at transitional issues and practical implementation of the scheme, which was due to commence in April, 2013. A report would be submitted to the Authority on 24 September, 2012.

Members also noted that current indications were that the National Fire Service would receive further grant reductions of 9% in 2013/14 and 5.4% in 2015/16, which was more than the 13.5% previously forecast.

(Meeting ended at 12.30 pm)

*Contact Officer: Stephnie Hancock
Democratic Services
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Tel: 0121 569 3189
stephnie_hancock@sandwell.gov.uk*

Policy Planning Forum – 10 September, 2012