

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**19th January, 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 Aston, Atwal Singh, Clinton,
Collingswood, Davis, Delaney, Eustace, Finnegan,
Hogarth, O'Boyle, Phillips JP, Quinnen, Sealey,
Shackleton, Singh, Skinner, Spence, Tranter,
Yardley and Young;
Mr Ager.

Officers: **West Midlands Fire Service**
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales);
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor);
S Barry, D Bromley, J Connor, M Griffiths and
M Harper.

Clerk and Monitoring Officer
N Sharma,
R Jones.

Apologies: Councillors Barlow, Douglas-Maul, Lines and
Mottram JP;
Chief Fire Officer.

1/15 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair reminded members that the following training and visits had been arranged and to contact Rose Jones or Julie Connor if, and on what days, they wished to attend:-

Scrutiny training following the Authority meetings on 2 February 2015;

**Policy Planning Forum
19th January, 2015**

Visit to Workshops in Perry Barr following the meeting of the Authority on 16 February 2015;

Visits to the Heritage Centre at Aston Fire Station following Authority meetings on 2 February, 16 February and 23 March 2015.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer informed members that on 7 January 2015 Aidan Thomas, who was the Department for Communities and Local Government Independent Reviewer, had met with him and had also visited Aston Fire Station and the Fire Unions. They had discussed various issues, particularly the strengths and weaknesses of the Service and its delivery model.

On 12 January, 2015 he had been involved with a meeting with the Chief Executive and Directors of Sandwell MBC and the Chief Fire Officer and senior Fire officers concerning joint working between the two authorities in the future, particularly in the areas of Children's and Social Services. They had also discussed work around the identification of owners of derelict, boarded up properties which had implications for both partners.

Peter Holland, the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor, had visited the Service on 15 January, 2015 and discussed the Service's delivery model, retained firefighters and other provision issues. As a fifth generation firefighter he had particularly enjoyed his visit to the Heritage Centre at Aston Fire Station.

He updated members on the current position with regard to the HS2 proposals. The Authority now had an undertaking from the Secretary of State, which would be reported to members in February 2015, which alleviated most of its concerns, however, the issue of likely disruption to the operation of Fire Control was under-going independent arbitration.

2/15

**Prevention, Protection, Response Integration and Business Support
Vehicle Update**

Further to Note 17/14 (Achieving Cost Savings 2015/18) (13 October 2014), members received Mark Harper, Area Commander and Strategic Enabler, Operational Intelligence & Risk Reduction, who gave an update on Fire Safety.

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]

Policy Planning Forum 19th January, 2015

Due to budget reductions the level of service provision had fallen by 25% and there were now 66 inspecting officers compared to 88 previously. This had led to a £1.1m saving. Some of the services provided, e.g. in connection with planning and building regulations, had moved to Headquarters.

It had been a risk-based inspection programme with high risk premises being given priority. However, the programme was now intelligence-led. Since July 2013 all inspecting officers no longer needed to report to Headquarters as they had hand-held tablets which could be down loaded at the nearest fire station.

A member enquired how the Service decided which properties to inspect and was informed that there was an order for work premises based on height, size, use, etc. however, the exceptions were single, private dwellings. High risk premises were visited first to try and manage down the risk. Occasionally there was resistance from the owners to an inspection, but officers had a legal right to be at the premises.

Simon Barry gave a presentation to members which focused on the Prevention, Protection and Response work line. Work in fire safety was not often highlighted as much as fire prevention. The traditional view word cloud for fire safety was seen as reactive, often in relation to information received as a tip off or after a fire. In the future vision word cloud prevention stood out, in particular how officers supported each other and were more proactive. There was an emphasis that fire safety was about making the West Midlands safer.

The Service Delivery Model was based on its response times assisted by its prevention and protection work. All prevention and protection officers were previously firefighters and this helped to provide resilience to the Service, by maintaining their fire skills set, to be able to cover in times of sickness, etc. Fire Safety officers were moving more to protection and working to reduce risk. It was the aim that all firefighters would be able to provide low complexity fire safety advice. To this end members were shown the "One Team" video.

The Prevention, Protection, Response Integration (PPRI) Principles were based on four self-perpetuating questions: Would it improve our performance and outcomes for the community? Did it build trust? Was it value for money? Would change bring Operations closer together as one team?

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]

Policy Planning Forum 19th January, 2015

PPRI was integration as one team, exploration of new opportunities, supported the service delivery model and strived for excellence.

In scope: Maximising impact, increasing fire safety presence in commands, being more focused on performance, offered resilience, enhanced delivery of prevention and protection and the use of Business Support Vehicles.

The impact of this to the community was:-

- Resources closely matched to risk
- Increased prevention and protection activities
- More knowledgeable people
- Better risk reduction
- Enhanced support for business

The following responses were made to a member's questions and enquiries:-

- Since 2006 it had become the business owners' responsibility for ensuring that their premises were in a fit and proper state. However it was still the Fire Service's responsibility to inspect. A lot of fire safety work was undertaken through business audits. Officers went to premises to meet the owner and/or health and safety officer and inspect the premises. The premises would be re-visited if or as appropriate. Although officers could enforce requirements through the Courts if necessary, they preferred to work with businesses to try and get things put right.
- Legislation as to what vehicles might e.g. flammable and hazardous materials, etc. was not enforced by the Fire Service but through other agencies. The Service inspected premises licensed for alcohol, but this was the building use rather than anything else. A lot of work was undertaken through partnerships sharing intelligence.
- The Service did provide advice to businesses though not as much as used to – there was currently no charge made for such advice.

Policy Planning Forum 19th January, 2015

Members received a presentation from Dave Bromley who was in charge of fire safety applications. All applications for assessing and licensing premises came through his team, which also dealt with all work to ensure the safety of outdoor events, e.g. Olympics etc. He had been involved with fire safety since 1996 and explained how the Service's involvement had changed during this time. It had now become more proactive and there was now more sharing of information with partners, such as the Joint Birmingham Licensing Task Force and the Black Country.

The presentation particularly pointed out the usefulness of the Business Support Vehicles (BSV) which the Service deployed.

During 2011 the Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) vehicle outcomes were:

- Reduced the amount of AFAs
- The majority of AFAs attended fell within the low risk category
- AFAs attended fell by approximately 25%
- 84% of incidents resulted in fire safety action
- Reduced repeat attendances at the same premises

Currently AFAs accounted for 67% of the Service's total calls. PI12 (the number of false alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment in dwellings) was currently 16% over target. If a BSV attended a call with a fire engine and there was not a fire then the fire engine could be stood down ready to answer another call. If there was a fire, then the person in the BSV was another trained firefighter if the engine was a member of personnel down. This provided resilience to service delivery and sent the right level of resource to risk. It helped to provide evidence to inform future decisions and supported the integration of Prevention, Protection and Response activities by increasing firefighters' knowledge of fire safety.

The key roles of the vehicle were to:-

- Attend AFAs
- Support the business community in managing fire alarm systems
- Complete relevant and proportionate enforcement
- Carry out structured and focused work with businesses that had the highest levels and demand in terms of AFAs.

The staffing and hours worked of Protection Officers were also reported and members were also advised of the equipment which the vehicles

**Policy Planning Forum
19th January, 2015**

carried and the locations in which they deployed in order to meet a 20 minute turn out time.

The following responses were made to members' questions and enquiries:-

- There were two types of call made for AFAs; one automatically made the call, the other through a remote handling centre. Some companies did monitor calls but the Service always received a call.
- The Service would ask the question if it was known that there was actually a fire at the premises and would decide whether to send an engine or a BSV. In some circumstances both would be sent anyway. Single private dwellings were not included, but those with multi-access such as sheltered accommodation were.
- 99% of AFAs were false alarms and the Service was trying to reduce this.
- If it became apparent that a call was a false alarm then the quickest way for a member of the public to report it was to dial 999. Although vehicles might have already been mobilised the more information received formed a richer picture about the incident.
- Once the Service had made its input into a planning application the building inspector would take these actions forward.
- Fire Safety Officers offered advice to everyone they came into contact with e.g. the organisers of the Birmingham Marathon, intensive care units in hospitals to make them more fire resistant, care homes, etc.

Members were reminded that the Mini BSV was outside the building if they wished to inspect it.

(Meeting ended at 12.15 pm)

Contact Officer: Rosemary Jones Democratic Services Unit Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council 0121 569 3896

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]