

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**23 March 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, Barlow, Clinton,
Collingswood, Davis, Douglas-Maul, Finnegan,
Hogarth, Howells, Mottram JP, O'Boyle, Quinnen,
Shackleton, Singh, Skinner, Spence, Tranter,
Yardley;
Mr Ager.

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach)
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales);
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor);
A Afsar, E Bourne, M Campbell, J Connor, T Dougdale-
Pointon, M Griffiths, M Hamilton-Russell, S Harris, J Merino,
P Shergill and S Warne.

Clerk and Monitoring Officer
M Dudley
K Gowreesunker
R Jones
S Sahota

Apologies: Councillors Lines, Phillips JP, Sealey and Young.

7/15 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair introduced Melanie Dudley and Satinder Sahota from Sandwell MBC who were the new Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer of the Authority. He also welcomed Karen Gowreesunker and Mike Griffiths to the meeting in their new roles as Clerk and Treasurer to the Authority.

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The Chair referred to the LGA Fire Conference that had taken place in Gateshead between 10 - 11 March, 2015. The Shadow Fire Minister Lyn Brown, MP had circulated a questionnaire to Fire Authority Chairs regarding regionalisation and three possible models. The Chair had circulated his response to members of the Authority. There had been universal opposition at the Conference, including the LGA, to a single national fire service as undemocratic.

Depending on the outcome of the forthcoming Election the national model would probably not be an option although it was felt there could be merit in a regional framework.

West Midlands Fire Service had arrangements with other neighbouring Brigades. Further discussions on a possible structural change would be held at the Regional Chiefs and Chairs meeting scheduled for 9 June and with members of the Policy Planning Forum on 15 June 2015.

In response to a member's question the Chair advised that the Fire Minister had not mentioned regionalisation as part of her speech.

Councillor Clinton apologised for a break in protocol, but wished to place on record her thanks to Gary Taylor and Sarah Warne's teams for their work on local partnerships and completing forty Home Safety Checks.

The Chief Fire Officer informed members that he had also attended the LGA Fire Conference in Gateshead and stated that the Minister's speech had covered issues that had arisen over the last four years and the merger of Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Services. She had also referred to the Adrian Thomas report which included reference to harassment and bullying in the service. The report would be available following the Election.

The Chief Fire Officer also informed Members that a small group from the Strategic Enabling Team had visited Scotland and met with officers from the Scottish Fire Service to gain from their experience. He also stated that the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) was not supportive of a national fire service, but more supportive of a regional model or co-terminous working in a similar way to Ambulance Trusts. A CFOA West Midlands Region event would be organised to take place on 16 June 2015 to discuss regionalisation.

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The Chief Fire Officer had given a presentation at the Conference regarding survivability and attendances times. This had been the best attended presentation outside of the main conference.

An “Our Story 2” event regarding the Service Delivery Model was being arranged where the same presentation on survivability would be presented.

At the LGA Conference, there had been several references and notes of recognition for West Midlands Fire Service. The Minister and Adrian Thomas had mentioned the Volunteers in Safeside and in respect of Technology and Innovation reference had been made to “999Eye”.

8/15 **Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion, Equality (DICE) Update**

The Chief Fire Officer introduced the DICE presentation. He explained that the DICE team formerly known as the Equality and Diversity Team had moved to become part of the wider Service Delivery Team and the presentation would be covering where the DICE team had come from, where it was and where it was heading in the future. The Chief Fire Officer introduced Preith Shergill, Strategic Enabler, DICE.

Preith Shergill introduced the members of the presentation team:

Jose Merino	Project Manager
Tristan Dougdale-Pointon	Equality Officer/Adviser
Michael Campbell	Firefighter
Elaine Bourne	Communications and Community Fire Safety Officer Campaigns Co-ordinator
Steve Harris	Group Commander (Community Safety)

Preith Shergill explained the direction of travel of equality and diversity from 2006 to 2013 and onwards towards excellence.

This covered:

Equality – Race, Sexual Orientation, Disability, Gender, Religion, Age, Marital status, Transgender
Discrimination and Victimisation

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Diversity-	Personality, Geographical, Social class, Education, Employment, Lifestyle, Cultural Heritage, Income, Caring, Responsibilities <i>Appreciating and valuing difference</i>
Inclusion -	Consulted, Involved, Engaged, Valued, Feel connected, Ownership <i>'the action of forming a united whole'</i>

Previously, Human Resources focused, Equality and Diversity arranged themed employee engagement, namely:

Birmingham Pride 2009-2015
International Women's day 2009-2015
Black History Month 2009-2015
Celebrating Cultural Diversity Evening
St George's Day celebrations 2009-2015
Islamic Awareness week 2009 – 2015
Asian Fire Service Association 2009 – 2015
Multi-faith Partnership Conference

DICE was now working more closely with local communities and connecting and reflecting the make-up of the communities of the West Midlands.

Positive Action was being used and provided a level playing field to under-represented groups and access to opportunities. Such action removed the barriers and enabled West Midlands Fire Service to reflect the communities it served. Positive Action stopped at the point of Selection and Recruitment.

Tristan Dougdale-Pointon stated that DICE was working to break down the media stereotypes of firefighters. In the last seven years, WMFS had increased the number of operational firefighters by 13. The number of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) female operational staff had remained static at 7 since 2011. 54% of support staff were female, however, 62% of female support staff were in the lowest paid roles.

One of the impacts of the efficiency savings in the last seven years had been that the overall number of female support staff had declined by 122 employees, whilst the overall number of male support staff had only declined by four employees during the same period.

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Preith Shergill informed the Forum of the employee networks that had been set up. One network, Affinity, previously known as We Are Women @ West Midlands Fire Service focused on:

- professional development including internal development opportunities;
- facilities and policies including work-life balance
- networking and role models

“Don’t be a Blank” - Tristan Dougdale-Pointon informed the Forum of the campaign in respect of non-disclosure of disability. 2.9% of employees declared a disability. This compared with 8% as a norm of employees and 19% of the working population. There were several misconceptions about disability within the Fire Service. He stated that one firefighter had a pacemaker and another was insulin dependent. A video was shown entitled “The Usual Suspects”. The video showed a range of members of the Brigade who were dyslexic. Following a Department of Work and Pensions campaign and release of the internal video, there had been a direct increase in the number of members of the Brigade confirming that they had Dyslexia. In a normal year, six people were diagnosed with Dyslexia and eleven were undergoing screening for this disability.

Race Equality – Firefighter Michael Campbell explained that the make-up of the West Midlands was highly diverse and outlined:

WMFS Area of Service Ethnic profile:

66%	English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
4%	Other
3%	Mixed
18%	Asian/Asian British
6%	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
1%	Other ethnic group

As compared to the Whole Workforce:

85%	English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
4%	Other
3%	Mixed
3%	Asian/Asian British
4%	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
1%	Other ethnic group

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There had been no positive trends of promotion of uniformed BME in the last eight years.

3% of the workforce was Asian. However, Asian firefighters represented only 1% of the workforce.

There had been seven BME females in the uniform workforce since 2011.

The largest representation of BME staff was in the lowest paid roles. However, the Service had adopted the principles of the Living Wage for Cooks, Cleaners and Administrative staff and was providing training and development for upskilling employees.

Compared to uniform staff, there was a better representation of BME support staff across middle management levels; for example, 18% of supervisory level and 13% of middle management were BME compared to 34% BME population within the communities served.

Race Equality Forum - Jose Merino informed the Forum of a recent Race Equality Forum. 100 staff had attended, 95% of whom had been BME from both operational and support staff. Excellent feedback had been received from the members of the Brigade who had attended.

Preith Shergill explained the Implementation Plan that had been created following the Race Equality Forum:

Four task and finish groups had been created.

Meeting 1 – Targeted BME Task and Finish Groups on the 4 areas.
Line Management, Enabling, Supporting and Progression
It focused on outcomes and creating long and short term goals.

Meeting 2 – Invited wider contribution to involve collaborators. Discussed goals and what could be achieved collectively.

Work to be undertaken

SET involvement/discussion and challenge

Race Equality Forum (REF)

DICE communication: why they held a Race Equality Forum, what happened at the REF. Outcome and what was going to happen next.

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Jose Merino explained that the Brigade had been a member of the Asian Fire Services Association (AFSA) for the last seven years. During that time AFSA had run six development programmes and 40 employees were members. Members of the Brigade and the Authority had attended the AFSA annual conferences.

Preith Shergill informed members of the “Reaching for Stars” programme. This programme was designed to increase personal effectiveness and self-awareness. The programme ran one day a week over a five week period and had a 98% retention rate. 80% of the attendees attended through personal recommendation. 50% were support staff and 50% uniformed. 40% were BME and 47% were female with 53% male. 6% of those attending were disabled. 83% of those attending felt the course would help them make a difference in the workplace.

Elaine Bourne attended the Forum to give her personal experience of the programme. Elaine had been one of the first individuals to attend the Programme. The majority of attendees on her programme had been female. She felt the programme gave her the opportunity to connect with her real self and to reflect on relationships both personally and in the workplace. The programme had increased her confidence and following the programme Elaine had felt happier and more effective. Elaine’s buddy had been a uniformed member of staff and they had found the experience mutually rewarding. The programme used the 50/30/20 method of time management and used reflection, listening and understanding.

Buddy Scheme - Steve Harris explained that he had acted as a Buddy to a member of the Brigade who worked in service support. Steve had found this an enjoyable experience and felt that both he and his Buddy had benefited from the Scheme. The Scheme was only open to those who had undertaken the Reaching for the Stars programme and new entrants, although there were plans to widen this. Buddying was seen a way of engaging aspirations.

Preith Shergill continued with the presentation and stated that the DICE team continued to be involved with the Recruitment process with the aim of the workforce reflecting the community they served using Positive Action. Preith Shergill and Sarah Warne, Strategic Enabler, People Support, were looking at the recruitment strategy. Examples of recruitment campaign posters were shown including engagement with Asian women’s groups and a group of Imans undertaking a day as a firefighter.

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The DICE team was also working on a “Be More Effective in 2015” development series and the Leading Excellence formal development programme was continuing.

The “Great Place to work Model” 2013 was proposed to survey: Trust, Credibility, Fairness, Respect, Camaraderie and Pride.

The DICE agenda for the future was being driven by the Chair of the Authority and the Scrutiny Committee. Members were encouraged to get involved and the members of the Strategic Enabling Team were constantly reviewing and challenging the recruitment strategy.

In order to engage with the 2.6m residents of the West Midlands, the West Midlands Fire Service Community Membership Scheme had been set up. A video was shown regarding the Community Membership Scheme. Members of the community were invited to join the scheme and get involved and help improve the services the Service offered. Members of the Scheme would receive a quarterly newsletter informing them of what was happening with WMFS and their communities, they would also receive monthly updates on safety campaigns to share with family, friends and colleagues. Members of the Scheme would also be able to get involved in fire station open days and have the opportunity to volunteer to work at one the Brigade’s interactive centres or out in the community. For younger people aged between 11-16 years, there would also be the opportunity to become part of the Young Firefighters Association/Fire Cadets.

Finally, it was explained that DICE was delivered through an excellent Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework, which included:-

DICE Statement
DICE Strategy – the way we work
DICE Policies
Excellence framework
Strategic Objectives
DICE Interventions in our communities and employees

Members commented that:-

- the Fire Authority should reflect on its own make-up in light of the presentation.

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- the Authority had moved forward a lot on its DICE principles in recent years and it continued to make progress. Every single person in the workplace should be treated with fairness.
- the presentation was both comprehensive and inclusive and provided food for thought and thanked the team for their work.
- over 9,000 people had applied for fifty vacancies and firefighters should be employed on merit and capability.
- the Brigade's commitment to employing a diverse workforce should be applauded.
- Positive Action was the right thing to do.

In response, Preith Shergill stated that the Brigade had rigorous criteria for recruitment of firefighters and that Positive Action stopped at the point of selection. The purpose of Positive Action was to allay any misconceptions around the role of a firefighter and to increase awareness of the opportunities available in the Fire Service.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that although the Brigade had tried to engage with all parts of the community and had received over 9,000 applications, the Brigade had not achieved its target of a service reflecting the community it served. He felt there was still more to do to gain a true representation of the ethnic make-up of the West Midlands. The Chief Fire Officer also mentioned the Adrian Thomas Report which referred to unconscious bias and that awareness should be raised with the Authority. This posed a challenge and opportunity for the future.

The Chief Fire Officer concluded that the Brigade was aiming to improve performance in recruitment and selection and raise awareness of the Fire Service as a career.

(Meeting ended at 11.58 am)

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